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World Soccer

GLOBAL FOOTBALL SINCE 1960

January 2015

SPECIAL ISSUE

WorldSoccer

AWARDS

TEAM & MANAGER OF THE YEAR REVEALED

RESULTS OF OUR ANNUAL POLL

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

CRISTIANO RONALDO

WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

2015 FOCUS

NEW YEAR STORIES

2015's big events...before they happen

LEAGUE REVIEWS

HOW THEY FINISHED IN BRAZIL

Argentina, USA & Japan

PLUS

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- MANUEL NEUER INTERVIEW
- HOLLAND LEAGUE SQUADS

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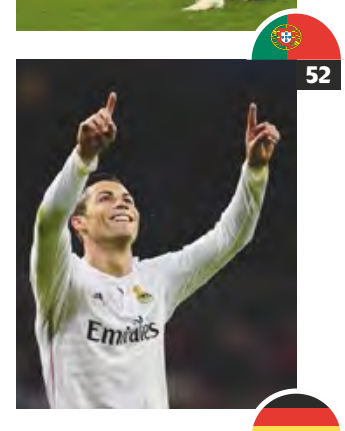

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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

MOROCCO...Cruz Azul's Mariano Pavone (right) celebrates scoring his club's second goal on a rain-sodden pitch in their win against Western Sydney Wanderers in the Club World Cup quarter-final

USA...Jamison Olave of New York Red Bulls gets to grips with New England Revolution's Jermaine Jones in the MLS Eastern Conference Final

SAUDI ARABIA...Ahmed Aljneibi of the UAE competes for the ball with Iraq's Amjad Kalaf (right) in the Gulf Cup of Nations

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ARGENTINA...River Plate fans light flares at the Monumental stadium during their Sudamericana Cup Final second leg against Atletico Nacional of Colombia

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FROM THE EDITOR

How will we remember 2014? As the year when Germany became the first European country to win the World Cup in South America, or as the 12 months when football's problems – corruption, financial excess – came to a head with the ethics FIFA crisis?

It's always difficult to review the calendar year in football. The natural course of a season, in Europe at least, runs from August to May. But there has certainly been more than enough to celebrate over the past 12 months.

> Ronaldo is only the second player to win our award in a World Cup year without actually lifting the World Cup trophy

Congratulations to Cristiano Ronaldo, winner of our World Player award, joining Lionel Messi and the Brazilian Ronaldo in winning the prize for a third time. He is only the second player, after Paolo Maldini in 1994, to have won our award in a World Cup year without actually lifting the World Cup trophy. That may reflect the changing nature of football and the increasing importance of the Champions League. It is also a recognition of Cristiano's remarkable individual talents.

Congratulations, too, to Germany and Joachim Low, worthy winners of our Team and Manager awards.

Here's to a successful and prosperous 2015!

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Ronaldo wins *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year award .. page 52
2 Michael Garcia quits his ethics investigator role at FIFA ..... page 10
3 Racing win the title in Argentina ..... page 32
4 Cruzeiro win the Brazilian championship ..... page 36
5 The African Nations Cup kicks off in Equatorial Guinea ..... page 88
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7 Gamba Osaka complete the treble in Japan ..... page 34
8 Genoa provide a surprise challenge in Serie A ..... page 46
9 LA Galaxy win another MLS title ..... page 40
10 Thierry Henry announces his retirement ..... page 17

SWITZERLAND

It's the same old FIFA as frustrated Garcia quits

Sepp Blatter's prospects of achieving his personal goal of securing re-election as FIFA president in 2015 may actually have been enhanced by the resignation of ethics investigator Michael Garcia.

Blatter has already announced his intention to pursue a fifth term in May and, by the middle of December, only former French diplomat Jerome Champagne had taken up the challenge.

Critics of Blatter's leadership lined up to pour scorn on both him and the world federation after Garcia threw his judicial toys out of the football pram and quit. But, in so doing, Garcia effectively halted the World Cup bid scandal investigation in its tracks, with no realistic hope of any further progress to embarrass Blatter.

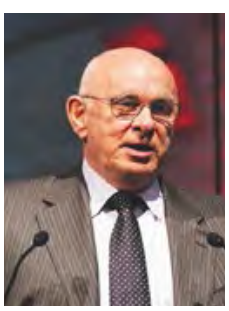
For Garcia, the rejection by FIFA's appeal committee of his appeal against the "erroneous" nature of ethics judge Hans-Joachim Eckert's 42-page report summary was the last straw after three months of increasing frustration.

In his resignation statement, Garcia revealed that his earlier calls for full publication of his bid scandal report and his actions over the World Cup watches controversy had been referred to the disciplinary committee.

Subsequently, both complaints had been dismissed without any leak to the outside world.

Later, Garcia had appealed himself against what he viewed as the travesty of a summary of his report, as issued by Eckert. This had been rejected "on procedural grounds".

For Garcia this was the end of the line. He said: "The Eckert decision



Appeal...Van Praag

"We wanted transparency, but this is a new failure for FIFA"

UEFA president Michel Platini after Garcia's resignation

made me lose confidence in the independence of the Adjudicatory Chamber. It is the lack of leadership on these issues within FIFA that leads me to conclude that my role in this process is at an end.

"Accordingly, effective today, December 17, 2014, I am resigning as independent chairman of the investigatory chamber of the FIFA ethics committee."

In the interim, deputy Cornel Borbely can take up the administrative reins but, being Swiss, his loyalties and motivations will be questioned. In any case, he dealt with only the Russian and United States aspects of the 2018-2022 World Cup bid scandal.

No one knows the breadth of evidence like Garcia – and no one now will know. Anyone with anything to hide over the scandal of the vote in December 2010 can sleep easy in their beds.

To this extent Garcia's exit has harmed the cause of FIFA reform.

His departure may also be seen to justify the initial concerns of reform guru Mark Pieth, who did not even have Garcia's name on his shortlist of candidates to take up the role.

Pieth's preference was the International Criminal Court prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo, but that candidacy was vetoed by two more powerful fellow Argentinians: state president Cristina Kirchner and AFA president Julio Grondona, who was FIFA's senior vice-president and finance chairman at the time of his death in late July.

Garcia was then proposed by Ronaldo Noble, secretary-general of Interpol, which the lawyer had served as vice-president for the Americas.

His admission of defeat in the FIFA ethics role was described by both executive committee member Sunil Gulati and Blatter's sole declared presidential challenger Champagne as "a backward step".

Bitter...ethics investigator Garcia slammed FIFA over its treatment of his report into the World Cup voting scandal

At odds...Garcia and Eckert (right)

Gulati, president of the United States Soccer Federation, was a member of reformer Pieth's independent governance committee before being elected to the executive committee.

The 55-year-old, who also heads the world federation's media committee, said: "I am very disappointed that Mr Garcia felt he had no alternative but to resign.

"It's certainly a step backward in the process of trying to bring positive change to FIFA."

Champagne, the former French diplomat who held senior roles at FIFA before being ousted in January 2010, also described Garcia's departure as a retrograde move. He fretted: "We needed to know what happened before and after the December 2, 2010 vote.

"When will the facts be known fully, transparently and above all without suspicion?"

Dutch federation president Michael Van Praag went even further, suggesting that an entirely new governing body were needed. The 67-year-old former chairman of Ajax made his views known even before the shock resignation of Garcia.

Earlier in the autumn he had been the subject of speculation as a possible challenger to Blatter, whom he had criticised to his face on the eve of the World Cup finals in Brazil.

After that confrontation, at a conference of European federation leaders in Sao Paulo, Van Praag noted: "I said to Mr Blatter that I liked him very much so this was nothing personal, but the reputation FIFA had built in the last seven or eight years meant people linked it to corruption, bribery, old boys network and such things.

"I told him: 'FIFA has an executive president and having an executive president means that at the end you are responsible...so people tend not to take you seriously any more. That is not good for FIFA, not good for the game, not good for the world.

"'You are leading reforms but all [FIFA's] problems occurred in the period before that when you were also the president and responsible so I believe you should not run any more.'"

In his latest utterance, Van Praag said he feared that FIFA Congress was unlikely to demand any significant change, hence a new international governing body might be the only solution to the game's crisis of governance.

Reinhard Rauball, president of the German league, has also suggested European federations should consider walking out of FIFA.

Keir Radnedge

"They have expelled us from what was our home for 33 years"

Atletico Madrid supporter group Frente Atletico on being banned from the Vicente Calderon Stadium after the death of a visiting fan

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/HZx4zb

1 BRUNO PERES
Torino v Juventus
Collecting the ball in his own penalty area, he produces a lung-busting run followed by a stunning strike that gives Juve goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon no chance.

2 JOSE HOLEBAS
Roma v Internazionale
Brilliant run by the left-back who beats two challenges before firing high inside the near post.

3 JAMES RODRIGUEZ
Real Madrid v Cornella
Times his run to perfection, splitting the opposition's offside trap before neatly dinking the ball over the advancing goalkeeper in the Spanish Cup.

4 DORGE KOUEMAHA
Lierse v Ostende
Opens the scoring with a superb chest trap and bicycle kick in the Belgian league.

5 AARON RAMSEY
Arsenal v Galatasaray
A stunning left-foot volley with bend and pace from outside the penalty area into the top corner.

6 DAVID MANGA
Ironi Kiryat Shmona v Hapoel Acre
Controls the ball on his chest before flicking it with the outside of his left boot to create space and then volleying home.

WINNERS

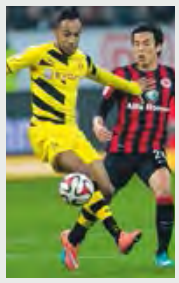
CRUZEIRO
The Belo Horizonte club claimed a second successive Brazilian championship.

QATAR
Won their third Gulf Cup of Nations title – and a first since 2004 – when they came from behind to beat hosts Saudi Arabia 2-1 in the Final.

AMERICA
Became the most successful club in Mexican history when they won their 12th domestic league title in the professional era.

LOSERS

BORUSSIA DORTMUND
Went the bottom of the Bundesliga when Stuttgart beat Freiburg and remained there after losing to Eintracht Frankfurt.



BOTAFOGO
The two-time Brazilian champions were relegated to Serie B for only the second time in their 110 year history.

BATE
Conceded 24 Champions League goals in their six group stage games – the most-ever for that stage of the tournament.

"They suggested I should help the club. I know the problems and I would do that for the club, which is going through some pretty bad financial times"

Romanian coach Cosmin Contra quit Getafe after the financially stricken Spanish side urged him to accept an offer from China's Guangzhou R&F

ZAMBIA

Zambia midfielder left paralysed after car crash

Zambia midfielder Changwe Kalale has been left paralysed from the waist down after suffering spinal damage in a car crash.

The under-17 international, who earned a senior cap in Zambia's 1-1 friendly draw with Ivory Coast in October, was injured in the accident along with national team defender Nyambe Mulenga and goalkeeper Satchmo Chakawa.

The players were making their way to Lusaka in a minibus to join Zambia's squad for a training camp ahead of January's Africa Nations Cup in Equatorial Guinea.

Mulenga was reported to have fractured his right leg, while Chakawa ruptured his spleen and bladder.

Tragedy...Kalale (left) in action for Zambia's under-17 side

ALGERIA

Dead player was "stabbed"

A post-mortem has suggested that JS Kabylie striker Albert Ebosse was stabbed and beaten to death after an Algerian league game in August and not, as initially thought, killed by an object thrown by spectators during the match.

A report claims the 24-year-old Cameroonian was killed as the result of "brutal aggression" amid "signs of a struggle" in the changing rooms.

The official report stated that Ebosse had "succumbed to a head injury after being hit in the head at the end of the meeting with USM Alger", which JS Kabylie lost 2-1.

The incident led to JS Kabylie being banned from African competitions for two years, and forced to play home league matches behind closed doors.

HEROES & VILLAINS

SAMIR HANDANOVIC

The Internazionale goalkeeper's penalty save against Dnipro in the Italian side's 2-1 Europa League win was his sixth consecutive spot-kick success.

Spot on...Handanovic keeps out a Dnipro penalty

CARLO ANCELOTTI

The Real Madrid coach set a new Spanish record for consecutive victories as his side made it 19 straight wins in all competitions by beating Ludogorets in the Champions League.

MANOLO GABBIADINI

Scored one and set up the other two goals in a 3-1 win as Sampdoria recorded their first victory away to Verona for 45 years.

DIEGO MILITO

The veteran striker spurned lucrative offers from the USA to return to Racing, who he helped win the Argentinian championship.

Welcome return...Milito won the title with Racing

Seeing red...Zadkovich lasted just 17 seconds

RUBEN ZADKOVICH

The Perth Glory midfielder was sent off for a crude challenge just 17 seconds after appearing as a substitute in an A-League leaders' game against Wellington Phoenix.

ALBERTO COLACO

The former general-secretary of the All India Football Federation was banned by FIFA for three years after being found guilty of accepting a bribe in the elections for the FIFA ExCo at the AFC Congress in May 2009.

TIGRES

The Mexican club had three players sent off – Damian Alvarez, Nahuel Guzman and Burbano – in nine second-half minutes as they threw away a one-goal first-leg lead to lose the Mexican title to America by an aggregate score of 3-1.

ATLANTA FANS

Following trouble after their home game against Roma, supporters of the Serie A side have been banned from attending away fixtures for three months in the first application of the Italian government's anti-violence law.

"Neuer, the best goalkeeper in the world? I think he's noticed more because of his audacious dribbling"

Chelsea and Belgium keeper Thibaut Courtois refuses to get in line to praise Germany's Manuel Neuer (left)

12 MATCHES THAT MATTERED

Recent crunch games from around the globe

APOEL 0
BARCELONA 4

Lionel Messi grabbed the 31st hat-trick of his professional career and set a new Champions League record of 74 goals.

SAUDI ARABIA 1
QATAR 2

Qatar came from behind to beat the host country in the Final and win the Gulf Cup of Nations Final for a third time.

RIVER PLATE 1
BOCA JUNIORS 0

After a goalless first leg, Leonardo Pisculichi's strike saw River beat their arch-rivals in the semi-finals of the Sudamericana Cup.

CRUZEIRO 0
ATLETICO MINEIRO 1

Atletico Mineiro won their first-ever Brazilian Cup, beating champions Cruzeiro 3-0 on aggregate in an all-Belo Horizonte Final.

MALAGA 1
REAL MADRID 2

Karim Benzema and Gareth Bale were on target as Real Madrid set a new club record of 16 successive wins – in all competitions – with this La Liga victory.

OLYMPIAKOS 1
PAOK 2

The Greek league leaders extended their lead to five points with a win at second-place Olympiakos, who suffered their first home defeat of the season in any competition.

NEWCASTLE UNITED 2
CHELSEA 1

Two goals from Papiss Cisse ended the visitors' unbeaten start to the season and prevented them from setting a club record of 24 games without defeat in all competitions.

AL AHLY 1
SEWE SPORT 0

Emad Meteb's injury-time goal made it 2-2 on aggregate in the CAF Confederation Cup Final and gave the Egyptian side victory over their Ivorian opponents on away goals.

LOS ANGELES GALAXY 2
NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION 1

In Landon Donovan's last-ever game for the club, Robbie Keane scored the winning goal in extra time as Galaxy claimed the MLS Cup for a record fifth time.

ROMA 0
MANCHESTER CITY 2

Goals from Samir Nasri and Pablo Zabaleta in the final group game saw City qualify for the knockout stage of the Champions League at the expense of their hosts.

RIVER PLATE 2
ATLETICO NACIONAL 0

The Argentinian side won the Sudamericana Cup for the first time in their history with a 3-1 aggregate victory over their Colombian opponents in the Final.

GUINGAMP 1
PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN 0

The reigning French champions lost for the first time in Ligue 1 this season thanks to Jeremy Pied's close-range header in the 11th minute.

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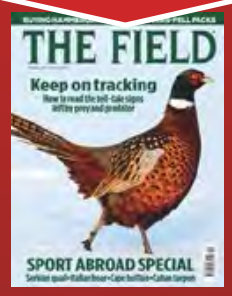

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USA

Stars bow out of MLS

New York farewell...Henry

Landon Donovan, Major League Soccer's leading scorer with 136 goals, played his last game for Los Angeles Galaxy as they beat New England Revolution in the MLS Cup Final. After being left out of Jurgen Klinsmann's USA World Cup squad, Donovan had announced he would retire at the end of the 2014 season.

Over in New York, former Arsenal striker Thierry Henry left Red Bulls after four seasons. The 37-year-old announced his retirement and will now concentrate on media work.

Meanwhile, another former Red Bulls forward, Colombia's Juan Pablo Angel, played his final game at the age of 39. Angel was in the Atletico Nacional side that lost to his former club River Plate in the Final of the Sudamericana Cup. The one-time Aston Villa front man returned to Atletico, his first club, last years after six seasons in MLS with New York Red Bulls, LA Galaxy and Chivas USA.

John Holmesdale

Hero...Angel receives a River Plate shirt

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Gerrard's dilemma: should he stay or should he go?

Where can Steven Gerrard play the best of his declining years in football if, as seems the case, he wants to rage against the dying of the light?

Does he stay at his home-town club Liverpool, where he has played his entire career, and with whom he famously inspired a Champions League triumph, but where a Premier League winners' medal has eluded him? Or will he be tempted by a final flourish somewhere new, somewhere blue like Manchester City, or with a corner of a foreign field to call home?

Age always withers sportsmen. The Liverpool captain knows that – which is why the questions weigh so heavily on his mind right now.

The sorry sight of Gerrard struggling for form with England in the World Cup, at the end of a blistering season in which Liverpool stumbled at the final hurdle in the Premier League, vividly illustrated that he is past his magnificent peak.

His late goal in the Champions League group decider against Basle that so nearly sparked another typical Liverpool revival on a European night revealed he still has force to offer. So, at the age of 34, he has one last profound decision to make as a player.

If Gerrard wishes the final phase of his football life to be measured in years rather than months, it will be achieved only by conserving his energy and inspiration for the matches in which he can have the most significant impact.

And that, surely, means he will be best served staying at Anfield.

Look at the examples of several equally high-profile talents in the past few years who prolonged their careers close to, or into, their 40s.

The Manchester United pair of Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes defied the ravages of time to enjoy fabulous moments at a time when most other footballers have hung up their boots and taken the soft option of punditry, opening a pub or begun the hard yards of coaching and management.

Staying at a club where they were immersed in the culture and the system was a crucial factor in continuing to perform with distinction.

The same was true of Javier Zanetti, who retired last summer at the age of 40 after playing as an outstanding defender with Internazionale for 19 seasons.

While loyalty earns its reward in this way, moving to a new club and expecting to feature centre stage as a veteran is unrealistic – however stellar your talent.

Matches have to be rationed. Giggs and Scholes played only 20 to 25 Premier League matches a season from when they were Gerrard's current age. This kind of transformation is best managed at the club where your status will endure beyond any dips in form or fitness.

Gerrard has always been a team man, too. He has forever played in the position the manager of the moment considered most suitable: wide on the right under Rafa Benitez, a driving attacking midfielder for preference, and last season as a sitting midfielder sending quarterback passes to Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge.

> If Gerrard wishes the final phase of his football life to be measured in years rather than months he will be best served staying at Anfield

In a Liverpool side that is struggling for goals, Gerrard has become a creative force again, required further forward where he can still both create and score them.

The idea – and it is one given a surprising amount of credence – that he will leave in anger because these days he doesn't start every game is risible.

He won't be a man for every match in a season, whichever shirt he wears.

It would have been understandable if he had skipped away from Anfield when lucrative offers came a decade ago, from newly rich Chelsea and the continental heavyweights Real Madrid and Bayern Munich.

But why would he go now?

Liverpool are entering a crucial period for the club, whatever the future of manager Brendan Rodgers, who is facing hostile criticism for poor transfer dealings with the money accrued from the summer sale of Suarez.

They require all the stability they can get in turbulent times – and, for me, it would be astonishing if Steven Gerrard decided to depart at just such a moment. WS

"We don't have any problem with him. He's a good man. He's kind to us, maybe too much"

Paris Saint-Germain's Thiago Silva (left) hints that coach Laurent Blanc is not authoritative enough

REPORTS we couldn't make up

1 Steaua Bucharest, Romania's most successful side of all time, have become embroiled in an extraordinary row with the country's ministry of defence over use of the club name, colours and badge.

Romania's supreme court ordered the club to hand the Steaua "brand" back to the ministry in the latest battle over the club's trademark.

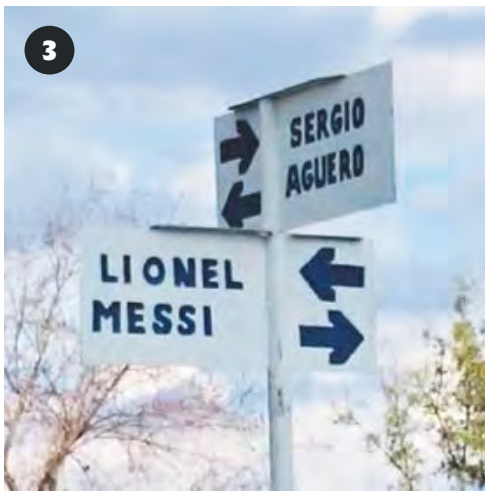
Steaua were forced to cover up badges on their shirts and training gear for their league match against CSMS Iasi. They also played in their yellow second strip, rather than the famous red and blue. Throughout the match the Steaua stadium scoreboard referred to the club as "hosts", while the stadium announcer introduced Steaua not by name but as the "champions of Romania".

Steaua were founded in 1947 as the army club and became the first eastern European team to win the European Cup when they beat Barcelona on penalties in the 1986 Final.

The ministry of defence claims that the Steaua "brand" has been illegally used by the football club since 2004 and have launched a series of legal actions, culminating in the recent supreme-court decision.

Steaua were granted a reprieve for their Europa League game against Dynamo Kiev, but sources at the ministry have revealed that €1million a year is being demanded from Steaua in order for the club to keep its identity.

No deal is likely to be reached until the club's owner Gigi Becali, who is currently serving a prison term for abuse of power, is released.



Street football...El Chanar honours its heroes

2 Rivaldo, *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year in 1999, is trying to sell the club of which he is currently president, via social media.

Mogi Mirim are in the third tier of Brazilian football and the 42-year-old – who played for the team in the early 1990s and ended his career there in 2014, in the same side as his son – went on Instagram to see if he could find a buyer. The price was not disclosed.

Faith...Father Arias' striking tattoo

3 A town in Argentina has honoured the beaten 2014 World Cup finalists by naming its streets after some of the players in the squad.

Any visitors looking to reach the main square in El Chanar, a town with a population of 3,000 and situated about 800 miles north west of Buenos Aires, will need to look for the intersection of Lionel Messi and Sergio Aguero.

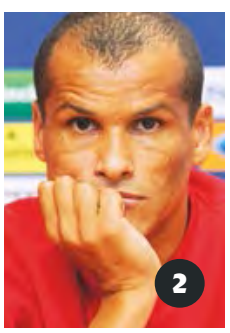
Other players to have streets in the town named after them include Javier Mascherano, Angel Di Maria, Marcos Rojo and Martin Demichelis.

4 Argentinian priest Juan Gabriel Arias, from the Natividad de Maria church in Buenos Aires, recently displayed a tattoo on his arm of Jesus Christ holding the shield of Father Arias' favourite team, Racing.

He had a double reason to celebrate as not only did Racing, who are based in Avellaneda in the Greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area, win the Argentinian title, but Father Arias – with the blessing of Pope Francis, himself a big fan of San Lorenzo – was recently elected to the club's executive committee.

Brand war...Steaua are forced to wear their yellow second strip against CSMS Iasi

Club for sale...Rivaldo



OBITUARIES

Hurt...Finlayson is injured in the 1960 FA Cup Final

MALCOLM FINLAYSON (1930–2014)
Scottish goalkeeper who won the league championship twice, in 1958 and 1959, and the 1960 FA Cup, all with Wolverhampton Wanderers. He later had a brief spell as vice-chairman of the club.

GHOLAM HOSSEIN MAZLOUMI (1950–2014)
The competition's joint-top scorer when Iran won the Asian Cup in 1976, he played 48 times for his country and scored 37 goals – which was a national record until surpassed by Ali Daei.

ANGEL TULIO ZOF (1928–2014)
A former defender with Rosario Central, he went on to become the most successful coach in the Argentinian club's history, winning the 1980 national championship, the 1985–86 Primera title and the CONMEBOL Cup in 1995.

LUCIDIO SENTIMENTI (1920–2014)
Capped nine times by Italy, he kept goal for Juventus and Lazio, among others. Three of his four brothers also played professional football.

Italy caps...Sentimenti

MARCO ANSALDO (1959–2014)
The former *La Stampa* writer, who was a regular contributor to *World Soccer's* annual awards poll, died suddenly aged 58.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

What is the point of IFAB?

The "Alice in Wonderland" life of IFAB, football's rule-making body, stumbles on and gets, if not curiouser and curiouser, then certainly stupider and stupider.

What, exactly, was the point of the meeting held in November? The annual "business" meeting, whatever that may mean.

"It is important to note that the ABM is a working meeting," says FIFA, which evidently feels that it might be mistaken for a "boondoggle". Working, in what sense? one asks. Well, says FIFA, "topics are discussed and can be put forward to the IFAB AGM" – which will not be held until March.

So, this "working" meeting is about discussing. Deciding and doing – action, that is – will have to wait until March. And probably quite a bit longer than that as IFAB has an apparently genetic tendency to refer topics for further study.

Actually, the November meeting did involve something new. After more than a century of IFAB bumbling along, making occasional and usually tardy decisions on matters of urgency to the sport, it was decided, earlier in 2014, the body needed help. So, not just one, but two advisory panels were formed – to provide IFAB "with greater expertise before decisions are passed".

But the panel experts, be it noted, do not have any authority, never mind a vote. They are limited to giving advice to the IFAB members. That would make some sense if those members possessed some special wisdom with regard to rule making. But do they? Representatives from Northern Ireland and Wales? Plus a changing group of four FIFA members?

There is little to suggest any sharp, cutting-edge intelligence being applied.

Anyway, as always seems to be the bottom line when it comes to IFAB, can any of this be taken seriously? One of the panels – the Football Advisory Panel – includes among its nine members representatives from New Caledonia, Trinidad & Tobago and New Zealand...but nobody from Latin America. But that line-up cannot be relied on, for FIFA informs us that "this list is subject to change".

The larger Technical Advisory Panel (14 members) seems to be more competent, though whether it needs to be so dominated by refereeing members (six) is doubtful.

> Advisors who advise themselves? Alice would have been right at home

But is it not rather Alice-in-Wonderlandish that its members include representatives from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales – the very nations that make up the four permanent members of the IFAB board?

Advisors who advise themselves? Yes, Alice would have been right at home here. After all, if the 14 members of the Technical Advisory Panel do their job, apply their expertise, why are they not the ones who get to vote? In which case, who needs IFAB?

This laughable mess, in what should be the nerve centre of the sport, will not be cleared up until FIFA stops trying to pretend that IFAB – formed in Victorian England in 1886 – is capable of functioning efficiently in the 21st century. It manifestly is not – not least because it lumbers into action only once a year.

It should be retired and replaced by a much more active, full-time group that makes its own enquiries and conducts its own research. **WS**

Taking it slowly...FIFA general-secretary Jerome Valcke addresses the media after an IFAB meeting

"Bayern and I are like a married couple"

Much more revered in Germany than in his native France, Bayern Munich's Franck Ribery swears his undying love to the German champions

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

National job... Bazdarevic

EUROPE

Six months after resigning, **HUUB STEVENS** returned as coach of Stuttgart, replacing Armin Veh, who quit with the club bottom of the Bundesliga.

DOMENICO DI CARLO replaced Pierpaolo Bisoli as coach of Serie A strugglers Cesena.

Ligue 1 side Bastia named **GHISLAIN PRINTANT** as coach until the end of the season.

JUAN IGNACIO MARTINEZ replaced Francisco Javier Rodriguez as coach of La Liga side Almeria following a 5-2 defeat at Eibar.

MEHMED BAZDAREVIC was named coach of Bosnia-Herzegovina, while **RADOVAN CURCIC** took charge of Serbia. **ROBERT PROSINECKI** was appointed Azerbaijan coach and **ALEKSANDR KHATSKEVICH** boss of Belarus.

PAL DARDAI took charge of Hungary and **IVAYLO PETEV** was named coach of Bulgaria.

JORGEN LENNARTSSON, who led Elfsborg to the 2012 Swedish title, replaced Mikael Stahre as coach of Gothenburg.

IAN BARACLOUGH was named manager of Scottish side Motherwell.

HAMZA HAMZAOGLU left his position as an assistant coach with Turkey's national team to take charge of Galatasaray. Former Fenerbahce and Turkey boss **ERSUN YANAL** replaced Vahid Halilhodzic in charge of Trabzonspor.

Gala appointment...Hamzaoglu

SOUTH AMERICA

TITE, who coached Corinthians to victory in the Club World Cup and Libertadores Cup in 2012, returned to the Brazilian side for a third time.

RAMON DIAZ, who guided River Plate to six Argentinian league titles and the 1996 Libertadores Cup, was named coach of Paraguay.

AMERICO GALLEGO replaced Gustavo Raggio as coach of Newell's Old Boys.

CONCACAF

OWEN COYLE took charge of Houston Dynamo at the end of the MLS season.

Ex-Valencia coach **JUAN ANTONIO PIZZI** replaced Gustavo Matosas at Mexican side Leon. **DIEGO ALONSO** took over from Enrique Meza as boss of Pachuca.

AFRICA

Ghana appointed **AVRAM GRANT** as coach six weeks before the start of the African Nations Cup.

JAMES DEBBAH has been appointed coach of Liberia. Former Arsenal striker **CHRISTOPHER WREH** took charge of the under-20 side.

In charge...Pinto replaced Medford

Colombian is new Honduras coach

Former Costa Rica coach **JORGE LUIS PINTO** has taken charge of the Honduras national side, succeeding Hernan Medford, who had assumed control in July following a dismal World Cup.

Medford oversaw a poor fifth-placed finish at September's Centroamericana Cup which left Honduras facing a March play-off against Guyana for the final place at the 2015 Gold Cup.

A 6-0 friendly loss to Japan in November sealed his fate.

OUT

Coming to an end...Rolfes

EUROPE

ROY KEANE stepped down as Aston Villa assistant manager to concentrate fully on his similar role with the Republic of Ireland.

Bayer Leverkusen and Germany midfielder **SIMON ROLFES**, 33, has announced he will retire at the end of this season.

Amkar Perm, third bottom of the Russian Premier League going into the winter break, sacked coach **SLAVOLJUB MUSLIN**.

SOUTH AMERICA

Palmeiras parted company with coach **DORIVAL JUNIOR** after narrowly escaping relegation to Brazil's second tier.

CONCACAF

Houston Dynamo winger **DAMARCUS BEASLEY**, who is the only American to have played at four World Cups, has called time on his international career after 121 caps for his country.

AFRICA

AZIZ EL AMRI resigned as coach of Moghreb Tetouan after the Moroccan side lost on penalties to Auckland City of New Zealand.

Paying the price...Junior

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Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Beckenbauer allegations cast a terrible shadow over football's integrity

"Say it ain't so Franz!" one is tempted to say, echoing a plea from American sport when, in 1919, the Chicago White Sox, then nicknamed the Chicago Black Sox, were found guilty in court of throwing the baseball World Series finals.

"Say, it ain't so, Joe!" were the actual words, attributed to a small, broken-hearted boy appealing to "Shoeless" Joe Jackson, the star of the team, on the steps of the court. In fact the words were never said. They came from a cartoon drawn in the wake of the scandal and the sentences.

Can we now hope that Franz Beckenbauer, and to a lesser degree Michel Platini, can convince us that the all-too-ominous and alarming charges over the Russian and Qatar World Cups have no basis in reality?

Allegations from *The Sunday Times* accuse Beckenbauer of accepting large sums of money to support both Russia's successful bid for the World Cup finals of 2018 and Qatar's for 2022. Michael Garcia, whose half-baked, ill-sourced investigation into voting corruption has produced so little of significance, summoned Beckenbauer to give evidence. The German initially refused and was briefly barred from attending the World Cup finals until he changed his mind, which he duly did.

It has been alleged that Beckenbauer has connections with two so-called football consultants. Andreas Abold and Fedor Radmann are said to have told a number of World Cup bidders that Beckenbauer's support was available for "a multi-million pound fee".

Both men deny this, of course, but a member of England's failed bid is quoted in the submission calling Beckenbauer "the most corrupt of the lot...completely in on the Russian bid".

> What hope for football now, as a sport above suspicion?

If all or any of this is true, it is a shocking blow to the stature and integrity of world football. Of all people, *Der Kaiser*, the virtual inventor of "Total Football" when, as a youngster at Bayern Munich inspired by the forays into attack of the Internazionale and Italy left-back Giacinto Facchetti, he invented the idea of the attacking libero. Beckenbauer, the man who captained West Germany to the 1974 World Cup and then won it again as manager in Rome in 1990.

Yes, we know all about the corruption of FIFA, inevitable from the moment Joao Havelange unseated Stanley Rous as president in 1974, initiating an appalling 24 years of chicanery. It reminded one of a saying from 18th-century English philosopher Edmund Burke, that "for evil to triumph, it is enough for good men to do nothing". Which, with a fleeting moment in Seoul when England's Adam Crozier spoke out before another tainted selection, proved shockingly to be the case.

We know all too well and so impotently that FIFA under Havelange's successor Sepp Blatter has been a sink of iniquity, but the charges against Beckenbauer, if they be substantiated, are infinitely more disturbing and unexpected. What hope for football now, as a sport above suspicion?

For me, personally, this has come as a horrific surprise. I have known Franz since the day after his deflected goal beat England for Germany's first win ever in Hanover in 1968. We were introduced at the airport by Horst Dassler, the boss of adidas, himself destined also to be deeply embroiled in FIFA corruption. Told that I worked for *The Sunday Times*, Beckenbauer responded: "Nein, nein, der profi, der profi. The best ever book in football!" *Der Profi* being the German title of my football novel, *The Rise of Gerry Logan*.

But by the time of the 1974 World Cup, in the Wiesbaden TV studio of ZDF, when my interviewer held up a paperback of *Der Profi*, saying what Beckenbauer had declared in Hanover, the book was out of print; and never reprinted.

Influence...former greats Platini (left) and Beckenbauer now wield great power off the pitch

Platini's role remains under scrutiny

And what of Platini? The word is that when he, as UEFA president, not only voted for Qatar when the tournament seemed destined to be played in 50°c heat and then subsequently backed the policy of playing it during the European winter, it was political pressure which motivated his seemingly bizarre behaviour. Pressure, purportedly, from the then-president of France, the ever controversial Nicolas Sarkozy, then hell-bent on maintaining good commercial relations with Qatar.

Platini reportedly bowed to the intense pressure. But if he was not prepared to resist it, would the honourable thing have been to resign? To stage the World Cup in the depths of the European football season would have thrown the clubs into chaos, those very clubs whose interests Platini as UEFA president was supposed to protect.

> Platini's vote for Qatar was seemingly motivated by political pressure

Like Beckenbauer, Platini as a player was a Titan of his times, a World Cup star, a supremely accomplished attacker, a master of those free-kicks he had practised so assiduously using dummies as mock defenders. A major force at Juventus when he moved from France to Italy. A European Championship winner with France in Paris.

Magic feet but, in both sad instances, seemingly feet of clay.

Wenger is the problem, not Arsenal's solution

Watching closely... Bould (centre right) and his boss, Wenger

The Arsenal crisis, otherwise known as the "Wenger crisis", has gone on apace, reaching some kind of sombre climax when, after the defeat at Stoke City, Arsenal fans fought among themselves over the manager's predicament.

By a previous irony, the call in some quarters for Borussia Dortmund's Jurgen Klopp to succeed Wenger was seriously undermined when he brought his team to the Emirates in the European Champions Cup and lost. But the surrender at Stoke, with its ghastly defensive mistakes, even though there was a belated, unsuccessful rally near the end, once again shone a harsh light on Wenger's deficiencies.

That the club reappointed him last summer for another three years seems more mistaken than ever.

The problem is there is no one in the Arsenal hierarchy to command. The chief shareholder, Stan Kroenke, has no soccer background whatever. The current chairman, Sir "Chips" Keswick, has limply announced that Wenger must have his way. Ivan Gazidis, who successfully runs the finances, and himself profits accordingly, has no football authority.

If only Wenger were flanked by a highly competitive coach. But you wonder just what Steve Bould is doing as he sits beside Wenger in the dugout. Once a dominating and highly effective centre-back, in the golden years of Tony Adams, subsequently after retirement made defensive coach, now the assistant manager, surely Bould can see the embarrassing deficiencies in that Arsenal defence, with its plethora of basic mistakes, and put things right?

As things so grimly stand, Arsenal must resign themselves to almost another three years of a diminished Wenger in charge. Since there is little chance that he will want to walk the walk, and scant indication that a benighted hierarchy will ask him to do so, the only feasible solution must be to find a coach capable of taking the team and especially its defence in hand, and strong enough to stand up to Wenger himself.

He has done so much for Arsenal for so many impressive years, but is now essentially the problem.

In charge...Ashworth, director of elite development

FA cause little offence with their misguided blueprint

Oh, dear. Another half-baked, well-meaning, fundamentally irrelevant plan from the FA to improve, nay even to revolutionise, English football. No, it couldn't remotely do the damage done by the asinine outdated theories of Charlie "Long Ball" Hughes, the misguided essence of which was to eliminate the midfield.

Like the path to hell, the talent blueprint is paved with good intentions.

The grandiose title is England DNA: Involving. Developing. Winning.

DNA indeed; that fashionable and largely meaningless cliche.

Somebody called Dan Ashworth, with the grandiose title of FA director of elite development, has been on this task for a year. Dare one say that the mountain has produced the merest molehill?

In the words of Matt Barlow in the *Daily Mail*: "This is another underwhelming document trying to be all things to as many people as possible without causing offence." As the Americans have it, no one can object to a philosophy of Mom and apple pie.

Surely we all want players to be comfortable on the ball and without it. And to intelligently dominate possession. In Hamlet's words, "Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished". At St George's Park, itself looking more and more a questionable and expensive enterprise, no fewer than 1,500 licensed coaches came to hear Ashworth explain his plans. He wants under-15, 18 and 20 team groups. In mind is the way the Germans, after European finals failure, got their clubs and the federation working together.

And so we are told the World Cup was won, Brazil humiliated. But what if Neuer had been sent off for that aerial assault on Higuain in the Final? And what of Germany's indifferent results since then?

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Lovell soccer

20 stories to follow in 2015

Gavin Hamilton highlights the key questions facing football over the next 12 months

1 WILL THERE BE A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO BLATTER?

Although the International Olympic Committee recently voted to force its members to stand down when they turn 80, FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who will be 79 in March, has every intention of carrying on.

Despite previously insisting that his current term would be his last in office, Blatter will stand for a fifth presidential term at May's FIFA Congress in Zurich.

Former Blatter ally Jerome Champagne is the only declared rival; UEFA president Michel Platini has said he will not stand but that he would like to see a serious challenge. ExCo moderniser Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein, from Jordan, is considering his options, while Chile's Harold Mayne-Nicholls said he was "studying the situation".

However, within days of hinting at a possible bid, the respected Mayne-Nicholls was being investigated by FIFA for possible misconduct during the World Cup bidding process. Such is the brutal nature of FIFA elections. Blatter-watchers fear nothing will stand in the way of the incumbent's re-election, especially as he already has the backing of Asia, Africa and South America.

Seeking fifth term...president Blatter

2 CAN HOSTS CHILE BREAK THEIR COPA AMERICA DUCK?

Chile have never won the Copa America, but they will have their best chance this summer when they host the tournament, which kicks off on June 11 and climaxes with the Final in Santiago on July 4.

After his side's impressive, attack-minded performances at the World Cup in Brazil, Chile coach Jorge Sampaoli has signed a contract that commits him until the 2018 World Cup. He possesses a strong squad, spearheaded by Arsenal forward Alexis Sanchez, and has the advantage of a decent group draw – having been paired with Mexico, Ecuador and Bolivia in Group A.

Home advantage...Chile forward Sanchez could have an exciting summer

Argentina, under new coach Gerardo Martino, have been drawn with defending champions Uruguay in Group B, along with Paraguay and guests Jamaica.

In Group C, Brazil and Colombia will reprise their 2014 World Cup second-round match, with Peru and Venezuela making up the numbers.

Matches will be played in eight venues across the country and a successful tournament will boost Chilean hopes of launching a campaign to co-host the 2030 World Cup with Uruguay.

• *Draw and match schedule, see page 84*

3 WILL WE HEAR FROM MIICHAEL GARCIA AGAIN?

The dramatic departure of FIFA ethics investigator Michael Garcia looks likely to have laid to rest any hope that FIFA might take seriously the claims of corruption and collusion that have swirled around Russia and Qatar's successful World Cup bids since the fateful decision in December 2010.

FIFA's reform process has now reverted to the chaotic internal procedures over which president Sepp Blatter seems happy to preside – oblivious to the growing anger of the wider world outside of Switzerland. Given his past form for rising above FIFA's myriad corruption scandals, Blatter is likely to filibuster his way through to re-election at FIFA Congress in May.

The best hope for critics of the process is that ongoing FBI investigations throw up evidence that confirms the rumours that have dogged both Russia and Qatar.

Gone from FIFA... ethics lawyer Garcia

Garcia, having spent £6million of FIFA funds, is likely to return to his role as a US attorney. His appeal to FIFA's ethics committee, followed by his carefully timed resignation, may have primarily been a bid to save his own reputation within the American legal profession.

Impressive...Lampard has been an important part of City's squad this season

4 WHEN WILL LAMPARD ARRIVE IN NEW YORK?

Frank Lampard's loan at Manchester City has proved far more successful than expected, prompting speculation that City could extend his stay in Manchester into 2015 and delay his departure for America, where satellite club New York City FC are gearing up to join Major League Soccer.

Such a move would place City's middle eastern owners on a collision course with MLS and raise serious questions about their global strategy. New York City FC, who will play in City's sky blue colours and be sponsored by Etihad Airways, are part of Sheikh Mansour's ambitious plan for a global network of satellite clubs that also features franchises in Melbourne, Australia, and Yokohama, Japan.

MLS envisage Lampard playing a vital role in promoting City FC as New York's new second club. But if Lampard stays in Manchester, critics will point to the growth of an alarming trend, whereby the world's top clubs shuffle top players around their franchise operations.

5 COULD A PUNISHED CLUB WIN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE?

Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain were punished by UEFA for their failure to comply with Financial Fairplay regulations.

Both clubs were forced to field reduced squads of 21 players, rather than 25, for this season's Champions League, and were also fined for breaching spending limits set by UEFA.

Yet despite the squad handicaps, both clubs reached the knockout stage of the competition. Although City face Barcelona and PSG have been drawn against Chelsea, both clubs have shown growing aptitude in European competition.

UEFA president Michael Platini faces the possibility of handing the European Cup to the captain of a club that has been sanctioned as a result of proposals that he himself devised.

Plastic pitch...one of Canada's Women's World Cup venues

Growing force...PSG

6 WILL PLASTIC PITCHES AFFECT THE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP IN CANADA?

Canada plays host to the Women's World Cup from June 6 to July 5, but the build-up to the 24-team finals has been overshadowed by a row over the use of plastic pitches at the six tournament venues.

Forty top players, including the 2012 and 2013 FIFA World Player of the Year, American Abby Wambach and Germany's Nadine Angerer, filed a lawsuit. They claim that FIFA and the CSA are discriminating against women by staging the event on artificial grass, which they say poses safety risks and alters how the game is played.

Former England captain Faye White said: "FIFA would never dream of hosting a men's World Cup on artificial pitches so why the women's? It makes you wonder if the women are some kind of guinea pigs."

However, FIFA secretary Jerome Valcke dismissed the claim, saying: "If anyone is saying the use of artificial pitches is a question of discrimination, it's a nonsense."

Valcke also hinted that grass pitches could also be ditched for future men's World Cups. "It could well be that sooner rather than later the men's World Cup will also be played on artificial pitches," he said.

Extra subs...IFAB will decide

7 WILL IFAB SANCTION A FOURTH SUBSTITUTE IN EXTRA TIME?

The International FA Board, football's rule-making body, will meet in Belfast from February 27 to March 1. The agenda has yet to be released but is expected to include a proposal to allow teams to deploy a fourth substitute during extra time.

In recent years, IFAB has taken some important decisions, notably on the use of goal-line technology. But other controversial proposals, such as the introduction of sin-bins during matches, have been shelved.

The Board is composed of eight members, four from FIFA and one each from the Home Nations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Also on the agenda will be the "triple punishment" of penalty, red card and suspension for a player who denies an opponent an "obvious goal-scoring opportunity" in the penalty area.

Under-20 champions... France in 2013

8 WHO WILL WIN THE UNDER-20 WORLD CUP?

FIFA will have a chance to put its much-publicised problems behind it when it stages two major youth tournaments.

New Zealand plays host to the Under-20 World Cup, from May 30 to June 20. France, the champions two years ago in Turkey, have failed to qualify, leaving Germany as the most fancied European team. There will be no showdown between the Football Association and Premier League clubs as England failed to qualify.

South America's contenders will be decided by the region's Under-20 championship, which take place from January 14 to February 7.

It will be worth keeping an eye on Qatar, who have been pro-actively naturalising youngsters from other countries.

Later in the year, from October 17 to November 8, Chile hosts the World Under-17 Championship. Nigeria were the winners for the fourth time two years ago in the UAE. Europe's eight qualifiers will be taken from the quarter-finals at UEFA's Under-17 finals, held in Bulgaria in May.

Moving?...Reus

9 WHERE NEXT FOR MARCO REUS?

Borussia Dortmund winger Marco Reus may have missed the World Cup through injury but he is set to be the most in-demand player in the summer's transfer market. His contract with Dortmund runs until 2017 but contains a release clause that major clubs across Europe could activate for a fee in the region of £25million.

In recent months, Bayern Munich, Real Madrid and Chelsea have all been linked with a move for Reus, whose team-mate Mats Hummels could also leave Dortmund.

Elsewhere in Germany, Xherdan Shaqiri could leave Bayern Munich in search of more playing time. In Italy, Colombian World Cup star Juan Cuadrado is said to be unsettled at Fiorentina, while Roma midfielder Kevin Strootman has recovered from the knee injury that ruled him out of the World Cup and he might be a target for his former Holland manager Louis Van Gaal and Manchester United. Moving in the opposite direction could be Adnan Januzaj, who has yet to cement a first-team place under Van Gaal.

Other promising youngsters who could be on the move include Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan defender Jose Gimenez and Sampdoria forward Manolo Gabbiadini.

2018 vision... World Cup stadium plans are in doubt

10 WILL THE FALLING ROUBLE HIT RUSSIAN FOOTBALL?

The Russian economic crisis, which has seen the rouble currency halve in value, is likely to impact on the country's football in 2015. Already, leading clubs are planning to release high-earning players whose contracts stipulate they be paid in Euros. Many foreign players were drawn to Russia by the low tax rate (13 per cent) but now find themselves out of pocket.

It remains to be seen how 2018 World Cup plans will be affected. In recent months, the Russian federation has struggled to pay the wages of national coach Fabio Capello and his staff.

11 WILL FIFA AGREE A DEAL ON QATAR?

FIFA is in a no-win situation over the scheduling of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Although there is a general consensus that the searing summer heat in Qatar will force a move away from June/July, nobody can agree an alternative. The European clubs and leagues are opposed to an autumn tournament, although that is said to be FIFA president Sepp Blatter's preferred time, while Michel Platini has stated a preference for winter. The clubs are instead pushing for late spring/early summer World Cup in May/June, but even then temperatures risk being too high.

Too hot to handle... Qatar in 2022

Another alternative is January/February, during the winter break of many European leagues, but such a date will be vigorously opposed by the International Olympic Committee, who are determined to prevent a clash with the Winter Games. Similarly, American broadcasters who invest heavily in Olympic TV rights, do not want a clash.

Because of the stalemate, it is hard to envisage any deal being done before the end of 2016.

12 WILL PAUL CLEMENT GO IT ALONE?

Paul Clement is not a household name but he is the most successful English coach currently working in European football. The former PE teacher has been assistant to Carlo Ancelotti at Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain and now Real Madrid, where he played a prominent role from the bench as Real beat their city rivals Atletico 4-1 in the Final in Lisbon last May.

Clement, the son of former QPR full-back Dave and brother of West Brom defender Neil, has never made any secret of his desire to return to England as a manager, but so far he has rejected the offers that have come his way.

As Ancelotti's number two, Clement has developed a reputation as a shrewd tactician and training-ground strategist. Making the shift from assistant to manager would be the biggest move of his career, but there is no doubt that a leading English club will come calling at some point in the near future.

"I'm enjoying it tremendously," he said recently. "That doesn't mean I haven't got my eye on what I want to do next, which is to try to be a head coach somewhere."

Rated in Spain... Clement

10th European title ...Real Madrid

13 WILL THE EUROPA LEAGUE BE TAKEN MORE SERIOUSLY?

The Europa League, the ugly sister of UEFA's Champions League, has been given a major boost this season by a rule change that will see the winners qualify for next season's Champions League.

Now for the likes of Liverpool, Sporting Lisbon, Athletic Bilbao, teams could miss out on domestic qualification for the Champions League but still feature in next season's top-tier competition.

Whether the rule change will enhance the status of the Europa League remains to be seen, particularly when the group stage throws up so many dead-rubber matches. Clubs such as Tottenham, who fielded weakened sides in last season's competition, may now be forced to take their games more seriously.

In recent years, with the exception of Chelsea in 2013, the Final has been won by teams who started in the Europa League, rather than being parachuted in following Champions League failure.

Serious action...Tottenham Hotspur

14 CAN REAL MADRID RETAIN THEIR EUROPEAN TITLE?

After all the celebrations that surrounded Real Madrid's 10th European Cup, what price an 11th title 12 months on?

No team has retained the trophy in the era of the Champions League. Milan were the last club to win back-to-back titles, in 1989 and 1990. Indeed, very few clubs manage to win their domestic league title and the Champions League title in the same season, such are the demands of the competition.

Few teams are as well placed as Real to defend their title. They finished the group stage of this season's competition with maximum points from their six matches and they travelled to the Club World Cup in December on the back of a record unbeaten run.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti equalled Bob Paisley's record of three European Cups with victory in Lisbon last May. A triumph in Berlin's Olympic stadium on June 6 would place the Italian in a league of his own.

The knockout-stage draw has been kind to the defending champions. They face Schalke, a year after a 6-1 rout in Germany led to a 9-2 aggregate victory at the same stage of the competition.

In demand...Stromsgodset's Odegaard

15 WHO WILL WIN THE RACE TO SIGN WONDERKID MARTIN ODEGAARD?

The race is on among Europe's top clubs to sign Norwegian teenager Martin Odegaard, who has been setting new records over the past year.

The 16-year-old Stromsgodset midfielder became Norway's youngest international in August, aged 15 years and 253 days. In November, he became the youngest player in a European Championship qualifier.

Bayern Munich have declared their interest in signing Odegaard, who has also visited Arsenal's training ground as part of a tour of Europe's leading clubs.

16 WHAT SORT OF CROWDS WILL THE GOLD CUP DRAW?

The CONCACAF Gold Cup, the biennial continental competition, takes place from July 7 to 26.

The group stage will take place in 13 venues across North America - 12 in the USA, plus Toronto, with a number of non-soccer specific stadiums being used.

USA, Canada and Mexico have qualified automatically. Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama and El Salvador are the central American teams, with Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Cuba and Haiti from the Caribbean. Honduras will play-off against French Guiana for the final place.

Up for grabs ...Gold Cup

17 WHAT NEXT FOR JORGE MENDES?

Portuguese super agent Jorge Mendes enjoyed a highly lucrative year in 2014 (see People of the Year, page 62).

The agent of Cristiano Ronaldo, Jose Mourinho and just about every other key figure in Portuguese football, he has been heavily involved in third-party ownership deals, which are still allowed in Portugal and South America, even though FIFA has plans to outlaw the practice.

Third-party deals... Mendes

Mendes has a stable of players that would rival the rosters of most major European clubs. His influence has led some to speculate on what Mendes' reaction to a blanket ban on third-party deals would be.

One way for Mendes to overcome such a ban would be for his company, Gestifute, to itself become a club owner. It would then be free to wheel and deal in player registrations, irrespective of any FIFA restriction on third-party deals.

In addition to deals for players at Portugal's big three clubs – Porto, Sporting and Benfica – Mendes has also been highly active in negotiating deals with Monaco, Turkish club Besiktas and another Portuguese club, Braga.

18 WILL ARGENTINA'S "30TH GAME" CATCH ON ELSEWHERE?

In 2015, it will be all change for Argentina's national championship, with the apertura and clausura titles ditched in favour of an expanded 30-team league played over the course of a single league campaign.

Most attention has focused on the expansion of the league to 30 teams, amid accusations that the new format will benefit big-name clubs who risked relegation under the old, smaller format.

But another, more intriguing feature of the new championship will be the fixture list. Each team will play their 29 opponents once, with a 30th "Derby Day" game scheduled against their historical rivals. So River Plate and Boca Juniors will play each other for a second time during the campaign, as will Newell's Old Boys and Rosario Central, and Gimnasia and Estudiantes in La Plata.

Derby...Boca (left) and River will play a special extra game in Argentina

The obvious advantages of the 30th game are financial, with both clubs and TV companies keen to cash in on the interest generated by derby matches. And watching with interest, presumably, will be the likes of English Premier League boss Richard Scudamore, having seen his plan for an English 39th game scuppered.

Underdogs... Northern Ireland

19 WHO WILL BE THE SURPRISE EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS?

UEFA's decision to expand the European Championship to 24 finalists irked many traditionalists, but it has provided a welcome opportunity for some of Europe's lesser footballing nations. By the autumn we will know the identity of the finalists who will travel to France in summer 2016.

Northern Ireland have their best chance of reaching their first major finals since 1986 after early away victories over Hungary and Greece. Under Swedish coach Lars Lagerbeck, Iceland have continued the form that saw them reach the play-offs for the 2014 World Cup, but they face tough away trips to Holland (September) and Turkey (October) in the finals weeks of the qualifying campaign.

The growing reputations of Gareth Bale and Aaron Ramsey could propel Wales to their first tournament for more than 50 years, but they face a tough challenge from an improving Israel side, not to mention a young Belgium team that is still developing.

Slovakia, World Cup qualifiers in 2010, are undergoing an upturn in their fortunes , while Austria, Czech Republic, Romania and Scotland all look capable of reviving past glories.

20 A NEW HOME FOR FC UNITED?

Nine years on from their formation from scratch by disgruntled Manchester United supporters following the debt-laden acquisition of their club by the Glazer family investment vehicle, FC United are poised to move into a branded new, purpose-built stadium in early 2015.

FC United have played home matches at Bury's Gigg Lane and Stalybridge Celtic while steadily climbing the football pyramid to their current position in the seventh tier.

Their new home, Broadhurst Park, is seven miles from Old Trafford but just two miles from Manchester United's birthplace in Newton Heath. It has been built at a cost of £6million – £2m of which was raised by fans through a community share issue. It will include an entire stand that has been repurposed from one of the oldest grounds in the world, the Drill Field, formerly home to Northwich Victoria.

New base... FC United of Manchester

"To have achieved the success that we've had on the pitch in the last nine years has been remarkable," says chief executive Andy Walsh.

Dispatches

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

ARGENTINA P32
Racing sit on top of the pile after winning the national championship, while River Plate claim a first-ever Sudamericana Cup.

JAPAN P34
Dominant Gamba Osaka win the domestic treble.

SPAIN P35
Things are starting to look up once more for Valencia.

BRAZIL P36
Defending champions Cruzeiro successfully retain their hold on the league title.

AUSTRALIA P38
The Asian Cup is staged outside the continent for the first time.

DOMINICA P39
Players must leave their comfort zone to progress.

USA P40
Robbie Keane scores the winner in extra time as Los Angeles Galaxy win a poor MLS Cup.

NICARAGUA P42
Former national coach makes accusations of match fixing.

PALESTINE P44
Participation in January's Asian Cup finals represents a milestone for the national side.

ITALY P46
City rivals Genoa and Sampdoria are making the news – on and off the pitch.

JOEL RICHARDS
in Buenos Aires

Milito back in triumph

Old boy's return helps Racing pip River Plate to the title

"There has been a generation shift among the coaches," said Diego Milito when asked why the Transition Tournament had seen such a marked improvement in the football being played.

"There are young coaches who are trying to change the style of play," he added, pointing to the likes of Marcelo Gallardo at River Plate, Jorge Almiron at Independiente, Guillermo Barros Schelotto at Lanus, and, of course, Diego Cocca at his own club, Racing.

With no relegation to worry about as the league prepares for a new 30-team format, it is true that a release valve in the pressure-pot atmosphere had been liberally applied, which helped improve the quality. But, nonetheless, the season produced a quality of football rarely seen in the Argentinian league in recent years – and this when the domestic game has long been mined of its top talent by the wealthier leagues, suffers a chronic problem with violence and is hamstrung by the eccentricities of its administrators.

Many players revelled in the climate, but none more so than Milito himself, who turned down lucrative offers from the USA and Asia at the tail end of his career and chose to return to the club that gave him the springboard to a successful spell in Europe. And like many before him, he returned in style.

Just as Juan Sebastian Veron at Estudiantes, Maxi Rodriguez at Newell's Old Boys and Juan Roman Riquelme at Boca Juniors, Milito's return was crowned with silverware as Racing won the league title. They have won only two in the past 48 years – and Milito became unique in the club's history by shining in both.

Alongside Milito was Gustavo Bou who, at the age of 24 and after being released by River Plate having failed to impress on

KEY MEN

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Diego Milito (Racing)
While admitting that the physical side of the Argentinian game left him struggling given his age, the 35-year-old's quality and affection for the club inspired Racing to the title.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Marcelo Gallardo (River Plate)
In just two short spells at Nacional in Uruguay and at the club he considers home, River Plate, he has proved highly successful, winning trophies in his first six months with both while playing attractive football. Narrowly missing out on the title was forgiven due to the stylish play and an international trophy.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Joaquin Correa (Estudiantes)
Newcomers in Argentina tend to also be early leavers and the 20-year-old midfielder is no different, commanding one of the highest transfer fees in recent years with his £6.3million move to Sampdoria at the end of the season.

More than a consolation...River Plate coach Gallardo with the Sudamericana Cup

Net profit...Milito lifts the league trophy as Racing celebrate the title in front of their own fans

several loan spells, seemed to have missed out on the chance of a transfer to Europe. But he found a rich vein of form, with 10 goals in 19 games, and propelled Racing to the title. It remains to be seen if Europe will now reach out for him.

From goalkeeper Sebastian Saja, through the defence with Luciano Lollo and Ezequiel Videla in midfield, plus the intermittent flashes from Ricardo Centurion, coach Cocca rapidly built a side that was effective and consistent.

Cocca proved even his own fans wrong. After committing the cardinal sin of suggesting he would rather win the league than the *clasico* with Independiente, he lost the derby and won the title. The euphoric celebrations in Avellaneda suggested that the fans had come round to his way of thinking.

At River Plate they say the title was lost in previous games, dropping too many points in games they drew. But it was against Racing that the "Millionaires" relinquished the place at the top of the table that had been rightly theirs for so long in the campaign. Under Gallardo, the reigning champions had improved with an impressive brand of fluent attacking football. But with the club in financial ruin, Gallardo had little in the way of a transfer budget after replacing Ramon Diaz in charge at the Monumental. He brought in Leonardo Pischulichi from Argentinos Juniors, a player who had spent much of his career in Qatar and China, but who proved a revelation in the position Gallardo once occupied, that of playmaker.

Despite the eye-catching football, River's limited squad size meant that with a Sudamericana Cup semi-final clash with Boca Juniors, Gallardo opted to rest players in the league game against Racing, who won 1-0 through an own goal by Ramiro Funes Mori and went top with two games of the season remaining.

The gamble paid off for Gallardo in the sense that River beat Boca – in eight *superclasicos* during the year Boca did not win once – and they went on to win the Sudamericana Cup too, albeit at the expense of the league.

Gallardo become the first man to win continental titles with River as both player and coach, having been a member of the team that claimed the Libertadores Cup in 1996 and said: "I feel very proud for the club.

"I grew up as a player and now I have managed to give this joy to the club in a different role."

At both River and Racing, there was a strong sense of communion between the supporters and the team. Both Milito and Gallardo had returned to the clubs where they had grown up, both bringing long waits to an end. In River's case, the team won their first international crown since 1997; for Racing it was a first title since 2001.

The political backdrop to the season was far less transcendent for the country, but behind the scenes at the Argentinian FA was the on-going disaster of attempting to iron out the myriad problems with the 30-team league, the last legacy of Julio Grondona who, after 35 years as AFA president, died after the World Cup at the age of 82.

After much wrangling, secret meetings and outlandish proposals, Argentinian football is set to be in a state of flux for at least two more years.

The 2015 league season will run from February to November, with 29 games and one extra "Derby Day", where every team will play its historic rival. Some clubs have simply been allocated a team for that game because their traditional rival isn't in the top flight. In November, two teams will be relegated and two promoted. Then, in 2016, there will be a short tournament from February to June with three relegated and just one promoted. It will also be called a Transition Tournament.

In August 2016 the calendar will be in line with European football, with more relegations than promotions to finally slim back down to a 20-team league. This is, of course, all subject to change.

So why not stick to the 20-team division in the first place? That is the question club chairmen and the AFA will have to explain over the coming years, as the headaches of programming matches, assigning referees and other administrative activities that the domestic game already struggles with, all begin to pile up. **WS**

> "This is special because I love this club. I started here and learned everything here"
>
> **Diego Milito, who won the league with his first club, Racing**

MIKE PLASTOW
in Tokyo

Gamba's treble after amazing rise

Last year's second-tier winners claim the treble this term

Game changer... Gamba's Usami (left) was a revelation on his return to fitness

Gamba Osaka clinched the J. League title by a point from one-time runaway leaders Urawa Reds to complete an extraordinary turnaround. Last year's second-tier champions were struggling in the relegation zone when the league took a break for the World Cup, 14 matches into the campaign. But they came back to win 15 of their last 20 games to claim the title for a second time, having previously won the league in 2005.

Urawa had looked strong, with a record run of seven clean sheets either side of the World Cup, and they streaked ahead with fluid, attacking play throughout September. Despite stumbling in the autumn, they could still have clinched the title with two games to spare, in a direct showdown at home to Gamba in November, in front of the season's biggest crowd of 56,758. However, Gamba won 2-0 with two late goals and went on to take the title.

Urawa will look back on 2014 as a season of lost opportunities. Six points clear – and 10 ahead of Gamba in fifth – with nine games remaining, they only won two of their last nine and crashed 2-1 at home to Nagoya Grampus on the final day. Even then, with Gamba only drawing with Tokushima Vortis, a win would have been enough to secure the title for Reds.

Kashima, Sagan Tosu and even Kashiwa Reysol, with a very late run, all also came tantalisingly close. Tosu, who finished three points off the lead at the finish, were top of the table at the start of August when they sacked Korean manager Yoon Jong-hwan over a breakdown in contract talks. Tosu promptly lost their next two matches and won only two of the next eight before picking up the thread once more. Kawasaki Frontale's challenge fizzled out long before the end but Kawasaki's Yoshito Okubu, with 18 goals, was top scorer for the second season in a row.

Gamba coach Kenta Hasegawa put his team's astonishing turnaround down to "unity", while club captain Yasuhito Endo just shook his head after the Tokushima game and admitted he really didn't know how they had done it. The media, however, came up with two reasons: striker Takashi Usami, the Gamba schoolboy who returned to the club last season from Hoffenheim but started 2014 injured, and burly Brazilian forward Patric, who didn't make a huge impression at Kawasaki Frontale or Ventforet Kofu in 2013 but added great penetration to the Gamba attack after joining during the World Cup break.

Usami is the sort of player who can drive coaches crazy; a sleek dribbler with exquisite timing, positioning, passing and shooting ability but a frustratingly low work rate who pops up from time to time to turn a game. Patric, on the other hand, is a hard running, powerfully built target man. They hit it off perfectly and shared the spoils with 10 goals for Usami and nine for Patric.

Gamba didn't especially create more scoring chances than their opponents, but it was how they took those chances that made the difference. Their defensive midfielders didn't let much through, so once the cutting edge had been added up front, Gamba could carry on playing it safe in the knowledge that the extra goals would come more often than not.

Gamba's league triumph was preceded by a 3-2 victory in the League Cup over Sanfrecce Hiroshima, league champions in 2012 and 2013 but mid-table this year. Two first half goals by Hisato Sato looked to have secured Hiroshima some silverware this year, too, but Gamba struck back with a brace from Patric and a third by another former Gamba schoolboy Kotaro Omori.

Gamba added the Emperor's Cup in December, beating Montedio Yamagata 3-1 in the Final.

While Gamba celebrated, cross-town rivals Cerezo Osaka, who made waves with the signing of Diego Forlan at the start of the season, crashed out of the top flight. Forlan never fitted in and was dropped as the team fired two coaches – Ranko Popovic and Marco Pezzaiuoli – and finished with the president resigning.

Tokushima were bottom all season, while Omiya Ardija went down on the final day. That trio will be replaced by Shonan Bellmare, who ran away with the Division Two title, Matsumoto Yamaga, who were promoted for the first time, and Montedio Yamagata, who beat JEF United in the play-off Final.

The new season will return to the two-stage format that was abandoned in 2004 and is likely to involve some sort of championship play-off between the top ranking teams. **WS**

KEY MEN

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Yasuhito Endo (Gamba Osaka)
Japan's most-capped player had a lacklustre World Cup last summer but bounced back with his club side in the second half of the season.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Kenta Hasegawa (Gamba Osaka)
The former international striker was a commanding figure as coach for six years at his old club, Shimizu S-Pulse, until 2010. Now 49, he led Gamba to the second-tier title last year and even greater success in the club's first season back in the top flight.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Caio (Kashima Antlers)
A skilful creator, the 20-year-old attacking midfielder was inspirational for Kashima this season and played a major role in their title challenge.

Commanding figure...Hasegawa

SID LOWE
In Madrid

Valencia are on the up

Singaporean investment is finally paying off for once-troubled club

New beginnings...incoming owner Peter Lim (left) with club president Amadeo Salvo

Peter Lim's car turned up at Mestalla an hour before Valencia's game against Elche kicked off. Thousands of fans waited outside the stadium for the Singaporean businessman to arrive, and when he got out of the car they began chanting his name. Members of his staff had arrived a few minutes earlier and were waiting for him. They were joined by the club president, Amadeo Salvo.

Lim embraced the president and went inside, soon appearing from the walkway above the crowd. When he took up his place in the directors' box just before the game began there were more chants and an ovation from the stadium. A huge mosaic was held up when the teams came out onto the pitch. "*Benvingut, Peter*", it read. Welcome, Peter.

And so, at last, on October 24, it was official: Lim was the new owner of Valencia, via his holding company Meriton.

It had taken over nine months. The club's president Salvo had overseen the process, always backing Lim's candidacy over those of other potential buyers, but it had been far from easy. Lim first set a deadline for the club and its creditors to accept his bid in January 2014. Finally, the deal has gone through.

Lim has spent €94million on buying 70.6 per cent of the shares from the Fundacion de Valencia. He has also agreed to assume the club's €230m debt with Bankia, the savings bank that was bailed out by the regional government, having eventually succeeded in negotiating terms.

Of the €94m spent on acquiring the shares, Lim paid €22m up front. The rest was paid for via a finance agreement with Bankia. That money will be added to the €230m the club already owed Bankia and will be paid back over 15 years at 1.5 per cent interest for the first four years and the European bank base rate plus 3 per cent for the remaining nine years. Lim will also loan Valencia €100m from his own funds, on the same terms.

Lim has also brought players to the club that are owned by an investment fund he owns with the agent Jorge Mendes. Andres Gomes, Joao Cancelo and Rodrigo arrived in the summer and are likely to be joined by others in the future. Third-party ownership, like investment funds, are not banned in Spain. Indeed, the league's president, Javier Tebas, supports their role.

Valencia must now satisfy the €230m and €100m debts, and they are also theoretically committed to investing €150m in completing the construction of the club's new Mestalla stadium, where work was halted back in 2009.

Lim hopes to raise €200m from the sale of the existing Mestalla. The club also owns the land on which the Paterna training ground stands and another plot in the city. "Twelve months after first expressing an interest, most people expected Meriton to leave, but that did not happen," new club director Chan Lay Hoon said. "We never had any doubts.

"We do not have to say much; the facts will speak for themselves. We will be here for a long time."

Lay Hoon added: "We need to build a new stadium that fulfils all the needs of the club and the community. Our objective is to try to get it finished before the centenary of the club [in 2019]."

In the meantime, the stadium has been given a facelift. The old Mestalla has been painted orange and black, images of historic players have been added to the main facade and repair work has taken place. The difference is startling.

The difference in the atmosphere is striking too. There is renewed optimism at Valencia. The emotional management has been impressive, creating a unity that was not always there. There have been some doubts and the announcement that the media will not be allowed into the club's AGM has concerned some, but Lim has been welcomed with open arms. Not least because things are going well on the pitch and there is the promise of more.

In the summer, Salvo sacked coach Miroslav Djukic and replaced him with Nuno, who was Mendes' first-ever client. Salvo explained that he had done so because that was what Lim wanted, even though Lim was not yet officially the owner. If some were uneasy about it, there is optimism now. Investment in players followed and Valencia have been hugely impressive under the charismatic Portuguese coach, playing a high-tempo, aggressive attacking game. **WS**

> "This is not the end of the process... it is just the beginning"
>
> **Meriton's director Chan Lay Hoon on the company's plans for Valencia**

HOLY CLUB CREST CONFLICT!

Valencia have scrapped plans for a casual-clothing line after a complaint from DC Comics that the club's intended "bat" logo infringed on the copyright of one of the American publishing company's registered trademark Batman symbols.

However, the club say the new bat motif was never intended to be incorporated in any redesign of the club badge.

The city of Valencia's association with the bat dates back to the 13th century, when a bat landed on the flag of King James I of Aragon as he was about to re-enter the city. Seen as a symbol of good luck, the bat was incorporated into his coat of arms.

Historic...Valencia's badge has featured a bat since 1922

TIM VICKERY
in Rio de Janeiro

Back-to-back titles for Cruzeiro

Holders are crowned champions once again

Cruzeiro cruised to a second consecutive Brazilian title, wrapping up the race with two rounds still to go. With a deep squad well marshalled by a calm, intelligent coach in Marcelo Oliveira, this was a triumph for continuity.

The team was very similar to that of last year, the attack built around the creativity of left-footed midfielder Everton Ribeiro, the thrust into the penalty area from deep of Ricardo Goulart, the promising midfield passing of Real Madrid target Lucas Silva and the dependability of goalkeeper Fabio.

Not since Sao Paulo's three-in-a-row in the middle of the last decade had the title been successfully defended, so for Cruzeiro to carry it off in some comfort, leading all the way from the sixth round of games, was an impressive achievement. Their points total was the best since the championship was reduced to 20 teams – so why did it all feel so underwhelming?

Perhaps because the competition itself was somewhat underwhelming. Fixtures were squeezed in either side of the World Cup, piled up in a way that surely had an effect on the quality of the spectacle. The 2014 championship had the lowest goals-per-game ratio in years. And then there was the fact that Cruzeiro did not look as sparkling as in 2013.

The team was clearly at its best in the early stages, but there were doubts about performances in the big games – doubts which grew in November when they lost 3-0 on aggregate to local rivals Atletico Mineiro in the Final of the Brazilian Cup.

Cruzeiro's closest challengers in the league were Sao Paulo, who in the second half of the year added Kaka to an attack already containing Paulo Henrique Ganso and a list of centre-forwards that included Luis Fabiano, Alexandre Pato and Alan Kardec. Sao Paulo coach Muricy Ramalho struggled to accommodate these stars and maintain defensive solidity – a defect which was shown up more in the Sudamericana Cup than domestically. Their semi-final elimination completed a disastrous year for Brazilian clubs in continental competition, but qualification for the 2015 Libertadores Cup has postponed the retirement of goalscoring keeper Rogerio Ceni.

The other Libertadores places, along with cup winners Atletico Mineiro, went to Internacional and Corinthians; teams fired, respectively, by Chilean midfielder Charles Aranguiz and Peruvian centre-forward Paolo Guerrero. Neither team, though, was especially convincing; Inter lost nearly a third of their matches, while Corinthians were much tighter but frequently dreary.

Gremio and Fluminense missed out, but even so there was some cheer for two of the key figures in Brazil's World Cup debacle. Displaced national coach Luiz Felipe Scolari drilled Gremio to the best defensive record in the division – clearly on some level a response to that 7-1 World Cup semi-final mauling by Germany – while Fluminense striker Fred, much maligned during the World Cup, finished as the league's top scorer with 18 goals.

The World Cup may have contributed to a slight rise in average crowds, which at just under 16,500 were the highest for five years. The tournament last June and July served as an advert for the live experience, and all of the stadiums are now seeing use – indeed some are being used more than they should be. A regrettable trend has been for teams to "sell" occasional home games and stage them thousands of miles away in the new grounds of Manaus, Cuiaba or Brasilia. This undermines the integrity of a league system whose very basis is that all the teams meet each other home and away. It also makes it harder for local teams in these cities to build up their own fan base, without which it is hard to see how these stadiums are viable.

It is very early days, but so far hopes that the World Cup would help alter the geography of Brazilian football have proved entirely unfounded. A third of the FIFA tournament was staged in the north-east, a region where the leading teams have large fan bases, but rarely punch their weight at national level. Perhaps over time the investments made in the region will help bring about a change, but it certainly has not happened yet.

The city of Salvador had a nightmare year. Bahia, who play in the superb Fonte Nova World Cup stadium, were relegated, along with city rivals Vitoria. America of Natal, another north-east team with a new World Cup venue, fell from the second to the third division. Sport of Recife, who have been staging some of their matches in the new Arena Pernambucano, will now be the only side from the north-east in the 2015 first division. Leaving aside Sport and Goias, from the central region, the other 18 teams will all be based in the south east or the south – which is clearly not an ideal situation for the national development of the game.

Amazingly, the southern state of Santa

Champions...Cruzeiro celebrate retaining the title

KEY MEN

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Diego Tardelli (Atletico Mineiro)
The end of the Ronaldinho era at Atletico freed Tardelli to wander across the attacking line – and he did so with such purpose that he made the national team.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Levir Culpi (Atletico Mineiro)
Returned from Japan to join a team full of self-pity after the humiliation of the 2013 Club World Cup. Changes in personnel and preparation resulted in the team regaining its hunger and big things will be expected in 2015.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Gabriel (Santos)
The latest Santos sensation is standing on the shoulders of giants dreaming of growing big. The teenager made a good impression either playing on either the right flank or in a central striking role.

Attacking purpose...Tardelli

Catarina will have four representatives. Criciuma were relegated, but Figueirense and Chapecoense managed to stay up, and they will be joined in 2015 by second division champions Joinville and Avai, who sealed their place in the top flight on a dramatic last day.

The other two promoted teams went straight back up after going down to the second tier a year ago: Ponte Preta from Campinas in Sao Paulo state and Rio giants Vasco da Gama.

Shock...Chapecoense (left) stayed up, but big-hitters Botafogo were relegated

Cruzeiro's 31-year-old forward Dagoberto won his fifth Brazilian title. Only the former Santos trio of Lima, Pepe and Pele – with six each – have won more

It was a traumatic year for two other traditional teams. Palmeiras celebrated their centenary in 2014 and at the end of the campaign could finally do so in their impressively rebuilt stadium. But they went through a nervy time – including an ill-fated spell under Argentinian coach Ricardo Gareca, who stayed for just nine league games but who was there long enough to add plenty of his compatriots to the squad, leaving a dressing room that was not easy for his replacement, Dorival Junior, to handle.

Key playmaker Jorge Valdivia was often missing through injury and the team had the worst defensive record in the league. A third trip to the second division was a real possibility until Palmeiras managed to save themselves from relegation with a draw in the final round, but there was no salvation for Botafogo. A year ago they finished fourth and qualified for their first Libertadores since 1996. It became increasingly clear, though, that the club had over-reached itself in financial terms and they paid the price in 2014 as unpaid wages accumulated. In mid-season the club sacked four senior players who had the nerve to complain about not being paid – a self-destructive move of such extraordinary stupidity that the club did not so much fall into the second division as collapse from a great height.

Almost all the big clubs who have gone down in recent years – including Botafogo in 2002 – have used the situation to restructure, regroup and win immediate promotion. With the new club president describing the financial situation as worse than he had imagined, it will be interesting to see whether Botafogo can bounce back at the first time of asking. **WS**

SIMON HILL
in Sydney

High point...Australia celebrate scoring against Holland at the 2014 World Cup

Australia welcomes continental showpiece

The Asian Cup hosts remain confident of making their mark

Historically, Australia's relationship with Asia has been similar to that of Britain and continental Europe; separated by geography, and with a population traditionally of Anglo heritage, Australia has never really considered itself "Asian".

Yet times are changing. Economically and politically, Australia long ago realised its future was intertwined with the likes of China, Japan, India and South Korea. But when it comes to football, the process of integration has been slow, even if Western Sydney Wanderers' Asian Champions League success has helped the process.

That's why the hosting of the Asian Cup on Australian soil will be an interesting barometer of the changing face of the nation. While the old ties to Britain and Europe remain strong, the numbers flocking to a country built on immigration are strongest from Asia.

Whether that will be reflected in the attendances at the games is debatable. Organisers have tapped into the migrant communities dotted around the major cities and certainly the games involving China, Iran, Iraq and even Palestine should sell well, as should Japan, South Korea, and, naturally, Australia. But by contrast, Uzbekistan versus North Korea may struggle to reach five figures at the 82,000-capacity Stadium Australia.

Media coverage of football in Australia has improved markedly in the A-League era and Australians tend to rally around the flag when international prestige is at stake. And with stadiums and infrastructure the equivalent of any in the western world, there are – to coin an Aussie phrase – "no worries" about staging a big event.

But for the football fraternity, this tournament is further evidence of Australia's growing stature on the international stage. While many remain angry at FIFA's decision to discard the nation's bid for the 2022 World Cup, most will enjoy the opportunity to watch the likes of Keisuke Honda up close.

As ever, the true measure of success will be the fortunes of the home team – and on that score, a certain level of nervousness is understandable.

The Socceroos have just completed their worst year at international level since the teams inception in 1922. National coach Ange Postecoglou, who was hired with a brief to regenerate an ageing team, got much kudos for the teams "up and at 'em" approach at the World Cup in Brazil, but a series of poor performances in friendlies since has soured the mood.

In mitigation, Postecoglou has carried out a thorough search for a new generation of talent, using 44 players in his year-long reign. But he is yet to find solutions to key problems. Specifically, the defence remains porous, while the attack is almost totally reliant on Tim Cahill, who will be 35 when the tournament kicks off. Similarly, Mark Bresciano – who is just three months younger than Cahill – is still the most consistently creative talent available to play in behind him.

The rest of the squad is made up of players who have potential, but are struggling to realise it. Left-back Jason Davidson is a good example. After impressing at the World Cup, he earned a move to the English Premier League with West Bromwich Albion, but his game time has been limited and he could leave in the January transfer window.

Still, many cling to the hope that home advantage will pay dividends and it is true that, under Postecoglou, the Socceroos are unbeaten on home soil, even if it amounts to a paltry two games.

> "I've got no doubt, come the Asian Cup, we'll be very, very competitive" Australia coach Ange Postecoglou

The group stage looks negotiable, although if Oman and Kuwait have both given Australia problems at home in the past. But the final game against South Korea, in Brisbane, will offer the most realistic assessment of the team's chances.

If Australia can win that match – and with it, probably the group – then this Asian Cup could really capture the public's imagination.

If the worst happens – and it's a possibility, given Australia are now ranked outside the top 10 in the AFC – then interest will wane and the narrative will switch towards February's Cricket World Cup, a sport where Australia's Asian links, through India & Pakistan, remain the strongest. WS

● *Asian Cup preview, page 85*

Finale...the Asian Cup Final will be staged at Stadium Australia, in Sydney, on January 31

STEVE MENARY

Time to leave the comfort zone

A reluctance to leave the island hampers development

Hopeful...the national team ahead of a Caribbean Cup qualifier in 2013

Dominica joined FIFA in 1994, when the now-disgraced former CONCACAF president Jack Warner was ushering in as many small islands as he could to bolster his growing regional bloc. Two decades on and the island has more than 20 active clubs, with the Dominica Football Association (DFA) starting a new grass-roots programme this season. However, facilities and development remain problematic.

"The teams do not have their own pitches; they are community grounds owned by the government," explains DFA president Glen Etienne. "We need better playing facilities, but the biggest obstacle in development of football in Dominica is the players need to focus on training on their own outside of the football season."

Cricket tempts many players away from training, but football in Dominica is also very insular. Eight clubs compete in the Premier League, which runs from August to May, and Portsmouth-based Northern Concrete & Steel Bombers won the championship and the Premier League Cup last season, but clubs from Dominica rarely venture off the island.

> "Players need to focus on training on their own outside of the football season"
>
> **Dominica Football Association president, Glen Etienne**

The last Dominican side to enter the Caribbean Football Union Club Championship was Bath Estate in 2011, but even then the club failed to fulfil its fixture.

Etienne is reluctant to discuss the lack of off-island participation. He hopes Dominica can somehow be involved in a proposed Caribbean League, but the DFA is not represented on the CONCACAF task force that is investigating the idea and the locals are sceptical.

"To finance a club, I am wondering who in Dominica would be able to do so, and which players from Dominica will be able to make it?" says DFA vice-president Jason Jno Baptiste.

No side from Dominica featured in the Caribbean Professional Football League, which ran for four seasons from 1992, but Dominica has been involved in another revived tournament which previously offered success.

Dominica won the Windward Islands Tournament in 1988 and 1990. After a decade-long hiatus, the tournament was revived in 2013. Dominica hosted the 2014 edition, but failed to win a game.

The 2014 Caribbean Cup qualifiers proved only marginally more fruitful. Dominica's 0-0 draw against Guyana was their only point in three games and they managed just one goal, which came from Julian Wade, who is one of only a handful of Dominicans to secure a professional contract overseas.

Wade, a 24-year-old striker, plays for Caledonia AIA in the Trinidad & Tobago Pro League, while goalkeeper Glenson Prince and promising teenager Anfernee Frederick play for San Juan Jabloteh and W Connection respectively in the same league. Frederick's cousin and national-team stalwart Kurlson Benjamin was briefly with Alpha United in Guyana.

Michael Joseph of Dominica-based MPJ Sports Management helped fix up Prince and Frederick, and he is critical of the DFA's efforts to help players to play overseas, saying: "The problem that we have down here is that the football association is not interested in making those opportunities possible.

"My goal is to see as many young players out on trials as possible at professional clubs in Europe and USA. But making that possible in Dominica is proving to be very difficult as I would have to fund the trip of any scout that I want to have a look at our players.

"No European clubs would pay their way to come to Dominica when we have not had any players from Dominica make it in the European game." **WS**

Local hero...Bath Estate's Kurlson Benjamin (right)

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Dominica is one of the Windward Islands and was the last Caribbean island to be colonised by Europeans. Controlled first by France, then from 1805 by Britain, Dominica won independence in 1978.

Population: 73,500
Size: 751 sq km
Capital: Roseau
Language: English, French patois
Religion: Roman Catholic, Protestant

PAUL GARDNER
in New York

Galaxy win poor MLS Cup

Game continues to grow but quality is in short supply

One of the most frequently asked questions of MLS is when will it adopt the northern hemisphere autumn-winter-spring season? One answer that never seems to be given is that the current summer-autumn campaign now finishes in November, giving the competition perfect timing for a review of the past year and a vision of what's coming up in the new one.

So, it has become traditional for MLS commissioner Don Garber to deliver, in early December, his annual "state of the league" address. And it is something that Garber does rather well, speaking articulately about the good and the not so good, all the while maintaining a difficult balance between optimism, caution and realism. His upbeat attitude is impressive.

Overall there was plenty of good news to report – more than enough, really, to outweigh the problem areas.

Big noise...Donovan retired after the Final

The league continues to grow, and in 2015 two new clubs – Orlando City Soccer Club and New York City Football Club – will be added. Of course, one team, Chivas USA, has dropped out, but new owners for the franchise in Los Angeles have already signed up and will be operating under a new name in 2017. That same year, Atlanta will join the league and take it to 22 teams.

The aim is to have a 24-team league "before the end of the decade" – which now seems a given as MLS has been for some while engaged in talks with groups from Minnesota, Sacramento and Las Vegas. There is also the David Beckham-backed entry in Miami, although the plan for a downtown stadium has run into opposition – and while Garber tells everyone "We love Miami", he is adamant that Miami without a downtown stadium is a non-starter.

So Miami is in limbo. Which is puzzling because the NYCFC franchise – backed by the Manchester City sheikhs – is going ahead, even though the promised New York City stadium has failed to emerge. During the coming year, and probably 2016, NYCFC will play at Yankee Stadium – a state-of-the-art baseball stadium but hardly one with an ideal layout for football. But at least it is in the city, in the Bronx.

Elsewhere the stadium situation, which is one of MLS' strongest achievements, looks good. DC United and New England Revolution, the only two of the original clubs that have not built new soccer-specific stadiums, both have plans to do so.

There was a slight hint of reined-in expectations when Garber mentioned the oft-repeated intention to make MLS one of the world's top leagues. In the past, the year 2022 has been given as the target date; this time, Garber merely said this would happen "in due time".

Garber also made short work of the suggestion that MLS should introduce promotion and relegation, saying: "It's not

KEY MEN

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Robbie Keane (LA Galaxy)
Finished third-top scorer in the league with 19 goals and was also the second-highest provider with 14 assists on his way to winning his third MLS Cup.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Ben Olsen (DC United)
Oversaw a terrific turnaround during the season as his side went from bottom to top of the Eastern Conference, setting a new club points record along the way.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Tesho Akindele (Dallas)
The 22-year-old striker scored seven goals in 26 games in his first MLS campaign and is reported to have turned down an approach from Canada with a view to representing the United States instead.

Third MLS Cup...Keane

happening any time soon."

Meanwhile, new TV deals have been signed with ESPN, Fox and Spanish-language station Univision, which will bring in a reported $90million a year – about three times the amount that MLS was getting from its previous deals.

But an increase in income comes with certain problems, and these will surface sharply at the end of January when MLS goes into negotiation with the players union to thrash out a new collective bargaining agreement.

The previous negotiations, five years ago, were resolved only a few days before the start of the season, and although Garber, basks in the increased income, he also sounds a clear warning, commenting: "We have informed the players that the league is not performing financially the way we would like." He says MLS clubs lost a combined $100m last year.

This is slippery ground for Garber. However much he may plead poverty, the players are very aware of the new sources of income, plus the large amounts of money that certain clubs have been paying out to lure top players, such as Clint Dempsey to Seattle and Michael Bradley to Toronto. These are players on multi-million dollar salaries. Dempsey earns $6.7 million a year, Bradley is on $6.5 million – and they share their dressing rooms with young players who make only the MLS guaranteed minimum of $36,500 a year.

> "At some point, everybody is going to look back on it and feel great about how far the sport has come and the league has come"
>
> **MLS commissioner Don Garber on the 2014 season**

The end of the 2014 season also marked the departure of two of MLS' top players in Landon Donovan and Thierry Henry. Henry has been an enigmatic presence at New York Red Bulls, having the occasional brilliant game, scoring some wonderful goals, while at other times projecting a moody, even surly personality on the field during his five MLS seasons. His legacy will hardly be a major one. The Red Bulls won nothing during his stay and he has expressed no desire to remain, preferring instead to concentrate on a career in the media.

Donovan, too, had his moods – notably, the famous sabbatical when, in 2012, he withdrew from the sport for three months. He later admitted that he was suffering from depression. But Donovan's legacy, as the greatest American player of his generation, is immense. After spending virtually all of his 14-year career in MLS, his career ended in glory when, in front of his home fans, he captained Los Angeles Galaxy to victory in MLS Cup.

That is the event that comes right after commissioner Garber's message; the game that closes the season. This year turned into an afternoon to remember, but entirely because of the emotion that surrounded Donovan's farewell to the sport. The game itself was almost insufferably tedious, with no one, not even Donovan, managing to rise above the mediocrity. Galaxy eventually beat New England 2-1, with the winning goal coming from Robbie Keane.

While feeling sorry for New England might have been in order – they were playing in their fifth MLS Final and have yet to win one – it was the tide of admiration and affection for Donovan that dominated the post-game ceremonies.

But when the cheering and the celebrating was over, there were some awkward pieces left for Garber to pick up.

He had already pointed out that, although MLS was losing Donovan and Henry, it would be welcoming Kaka, David Villa and Frank Lampard in 2015. But the utterly poor quality of the Final was not so easy to deal with.

The quality of the football on the pitch rarely get discussed during Garber's messages. Playing style, tactics, individual players, refereeing get barely a mention.

Garber is primarily a marketing man who is doing a pretty good job in that area. But during 2014 a heated squabble broke out between Garber and national coach Jurgen Klinsmann, with Klinsmann being highly critical of the standard of play in MLS and, basically, advising young American players to try their luck in Europe if they wanted to improve their game.

To have the national coach publicly trashing the domestic league was more than Garber would put up with, and he loudly told Klinsmann that his words were not helpful for a growing league that was spending millions on player development.

Klinsmann issued one of those "I didn't mean to..." pseudo apologies.

But unfortunately for Garber, MLS Cup 2014 came across like stark proof that the domestic game in the United States is far from satisfactory. **WS**

BRYAN KAY

Former national coach accuses match-fixers

Local press highlight thee games that ex-boss says were rigged

The recently departed coach of Nicaragua's national team has thrust Central American football into a fresh match-rigging scandal after making an explosive series of allegations principally aimed at Nicaraguan and Guatemalan players.

Enrique Llena claimed four matches involving Nicaragua were fixed in recent years – one of which, a 2-0 win for Nicaragua against Guatemala, helped the country qualify for a first-ever CONCACAF Gold Cup in 2009.

The others were a 4-0 defeat against Panama at the Gold Cup in question, a 5-0 friendly loss at the hands of Guatemala in 2010, and a 5-1 World Cup qualifying reverse versus Panama in 2011.

Llena claims that Guatemalan players were at the heart of the plot to fix the 2-0 scoreline, a 2009 UNCAF Nations Cup game, while the friendly in 2010 involved Salvadoran-born Nicaragua international defender Armando Collado, who has since been banned from playing for life by FIFA.

Two of the games occurred under the stewardship of Llena, who took over early in 2010. The 5-0 friendly defeat against Guatemala, his first match, came under scrutiny in 2012 and Collado incurred his life ban for the part he played in fixing the game. There is no indication that Llena himself was involved in any of the rigging.

2009 UNCAF Nations Cup...Nicaragua's Armando Reyes (left) clashes with Minor Lopez of Guatemala

Whistle-blower... former boss Llena

Llena left his post with Nicaragua in November amid claims that he was gaining salary increases despite a string of poor results. He made the match-fixing claims in interviews with the Nicaraguan national press shortly before leaving for his homeland, Spain. In one interview, with *Confidencial*, he lamented that the local press had been highly critical whenever he did not select certain players for the national team but that they failed to pursue known claims of widespread match-fixing allegations involving Nicaraguan players.

Llena said as many as eight players could have been involved in fixing the 2010 Guatemala friendly. He claims he learned of the rigging when a young player involved confided in him afterwards. Llena said both FIFA and Interpol are investigating. The rigging is said to be organised by a Singaporean betting syndicate.

FIFA refused to comment, quoting regulations that forbid the body from jeopardising any investigations. "Speaking generally, the integrity of the game is a top priority for FIFA and as such we take any allegations of match manipulation very seriously," a spokesman said.

For its part, the National Football Federation of Guatemala labelled Llena's accusations as irresponsible and questioned why he didn't come forward with the statements earlier.

Otoniel Olivas, Llena's predecessor as Nicaraguan coach, who was in charge of qualification for and during the 2009 Gold Cup, told Nicaraguan daily newspaper *La Prensa* the allegations were "misplaced", denying knowledge of any match-fixing on his watch. He suggested Llena was attempting to compensate for his own shortcomings while in charge of the national set-up.

Central America is considered ripe for the rigging of matches due to the region's poor economic conditions. Last year, FIFA took action against 20 El Salvador players for fixing games involving their national team between 2010 and 2013. Of the total, 14 received lifetime suspensions from the game, while Rodolfo Zelaya, a prolific striker at international level, received a one-year ban. **WS**

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in the West Bank

Acceptance at last

The national team's participation in the Asian Cup is a milestone in the region

The Jericho International Stadium appeared to have been named either in naivety, error or as part of a very long-running joke. It was a late afternoon in the summer of 2006 and a football match was about to take place in the famous ancient West Bank city. The windows outside the forlorn-looking stadium were smashed and peeling posters of Yasser Arafat clung limply to the pitted concrete walls as a single line of fans shuffled through the one working turnstile, paying seven Israeli shekels for a ticket.

There was one stand, half full with supporters of two of the West Bank's biggest teams, Thaqafi Tulkarem and Tarji Wadi Al Nes. Football finds a way even in the most inhospitable environments, but even football has its limits.

Israeli movement restrictions and road blocks – imposed following the second Intifada, or Palestinian uprising, in 2000 – had made league fixtures all but impossible to fulfil. All that was left was a haphazardly arranged cup competition.

The teams arrived just before the arranged kick-off time but the referee was nowhere to be seen. He arrived half an hour later after being held at a checkpoint.

This was bad news for a number of reasons. If the match overran, the untrustworthy floodlights would be needed. Electricity was scarce. And getting home to the north of the West Bank would be impossible after a certain time thanks to the restrictions. The players would be stuck on the wrong side of an Israeli checkpoint.

Naturally, the game went all the way to penalties. Wadi Al Nes prevailed, as did the floodlights – which were turned off the second the winning spot-kick went in. The players didn't celebrate. They sprinted to waiting cars and sped off, still wearing their kit and boots, desperate to make it home.

Back then, the thought that Jericho, Tulkarem, Ramallah or any other Palestinian city might aspire to being a stadium of international importance seemed as far away as sustainable life on Mars.

Since being recognised by FIFA in 1998 – one of Sepp Blatter's first and most enduring acts of his presidency – and my visit in 2006, Palestine football had barely survived. The national team's players were split between the West Bank and Gaza, and could only train together for international fixtures in a third country. On the rare occasion that it could be arranged, they would be routinely prevented from leaving, arrested or worse.

One such player, Mahmoud Sarsak, was arrested at the border, allegedly tortured and held in administrative detention for 18 months without charge. He was only released after going on hunger strike and losing nearly half his body weight.

So many players were prevented from leaving Gaza that Palestine couldn't field a full team for a 2006 World Cup qualifier in Doha. The same thing happened in

AFC CHALLENGE CUP

	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014
WINNERS	TAJIKISTAN	INDIA	N KOREA	N KOREA	PALESTINE
RUNNERS-UP	SRI LANKA	TAJIKISTAN	TURKMENISTAN	TURKMENISTAN	PHILIPPINES

(* since 2008, the winners have qualified for the Asian Cup)

National pride...the team display the flag as they listen to their anthem at September's Peace Cup in Manila

Success...Palestine president Mahmoud Abbas (left) shares in the AFC Challenge Cup glory

> "All of the world will see the Palestinian people. This is very important"
>
> Former Palestine coach Jamal Mahmoud on qualifying for the Asian Cup finals

qualification for the 2010 finals, when the Palestinians had to forfeit the fixture.

Whenever tension flared between the two sides – or in the Palestinian case, between its own internal Hamas and Fatah factions – the game would invariably suffer. The Palestine Stadium in Gaza City has been hit so many times by Israeli rockets that local residents living in the refugee camp surrounding it have lost count.

Palestine's football was a husk, barely alive. Yet over the past eight years, it has embarked on a miraculous journey.

As political tensions in the West Bank eased, and along with it movement restrictions, a space was created for a professional league. A women's league was set up, too. In 2008 Palestine played its first home game, against neighbouring Jordan, near Ramallah at the Faisal Al Husseini stadium, renovated with Saudi, French and UN money and a few metres from the concrete separation barrier that snakes through the pale-coloured Biblical moonscape that both sides covet.

Later the Palestine women's team would play here too, in front of a packed 12,000, almost all female crowd. Then came the first competitive game on home soil, a 2012 Olympic qualifier, and a first home World Cup qualifier, against Afghanistan. In June 2014, Palestine made history again, beating the Philippines 1-0 in the Final of the AFC Challenge Cup in the Maldives to secure their first spot at a major international tournament, the 2015 Asian Cup in Australia.

There are a myriad of reasons for Palestinian football's ascent. At first it trod a familiar path, reaching out to its diaspora in Chile, Jordan and beyond. Yet almost the entire squad today is homegrown. Foreign players are tightly regulated in the West Bank Premier League and wages are comparable to the Israeli league next door. The election of Jibril Rajoub – Arafat's former West Bank security advisor and a political heavyweight within Fatah tipped to be a future president – as head of the Palestinian Football Association ensured a hard-headed negotiator to make tough deals with the Israelis. Rajoub speaks fluent Hebrew from his time in an Israeli prison for throwing a grenade at a soldier. He rejected violence and successfully negotiated the terms for the new stadium.

Border detention of players still takes place, however, despite a high-level mechanism set up between the two sides and monitored by FIFA. On the way to the AFC Challenge Cup a player was arrested and the team's Jordanian coach Jamal Mahmoud and his assistant held. The latter two were released but the player missed the tournament.

"It's very important to Palestinians that we go to the Asian Cup for the first time," said Mahmoud before the Final. But he also realised an equally important goal, and why such heavyweight political figures are involved in Palestinian sport: the national team normalises a Palestinian entity. Its flag flies equal to others.

The run-up to the tournament has been fraught for other reasons. Mahmoud, 41, was sacked in September. His rumoured replacement was Diego Maradona but it was decided that he was perhaps not the most diplomatic figure to have in such a combustible part of the world. And a warm-up match arranged with Iran in Tehran is bound to raise eyebrows in Israel.

But when the national team walk out on to the pitch in Australia on January 12, against holders Japan, it will be the apex of Palestinian footballing achievement that back in 2006 looked impossible.

"It shows we are progressing," said defender Omar Jarun. "Now the world will see us as a footballing country." **WS**

Ruins...a crater lies in the middle of the stadium in Gaza City after an Israeli air raid in 2006

ITALY

PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

Sampdoria and Genoa riding high

City rivals are in the news this season – on and off the pitch

Centre stage...Sampdoria's film-maker president Ferrero celebrates a victory

As 2014 came to an end, it was hard to keep Genoa out of the news. Not only were the city's two clubs riding high in Serie A, battling for third place behind Juventus and Roma, the two men who lead Genoa and Sampdoria – Enrico Preziosi and Massimo Ferrero respectively – were generating just as much media attention.

In their time, Genoa and Sampdoria have both written some wonderful pages in Italian football history.

Genoa are not only the country's oldest surviving club, founded in 1893, but they were also the winners of the first-ever Italian *campionato*, in 1898.

Sampdoria, founded in 1946, have the distinction of being one of the few clubs in modern times to have broken the Juventus/Internazionale/Milan stranglehold on the Serie A title – although, admittedly, that was back in 1991. Samp won the league with a wonderful Vujadin Boskov-coached side that revolved around such talents as Roberto Mancini, Gianluca Vialli and Brazil's Toninho Cerezo.

To some extent, the Italian federation acknowledged the historic link to the city in November, when it opted to play a re-arranged friendly with Albania in Genoa, rather than the original venue of Parma, in response to a series of devastating flash floods which killed one person and did huge infrastructural damage to the entire Liguria region. Thanks to the Albania game, which Italy won 1-0, the federation was able to set aside around €700,000 to help with the restoration of damaged amateur and lower-level football pitches in the region.

As for the two clubs, it seems unrealistic to expect either to sustain their present runs all the way to the end of the season. However, both have shown enough to suggest that their current form is no mere flash in the pan.

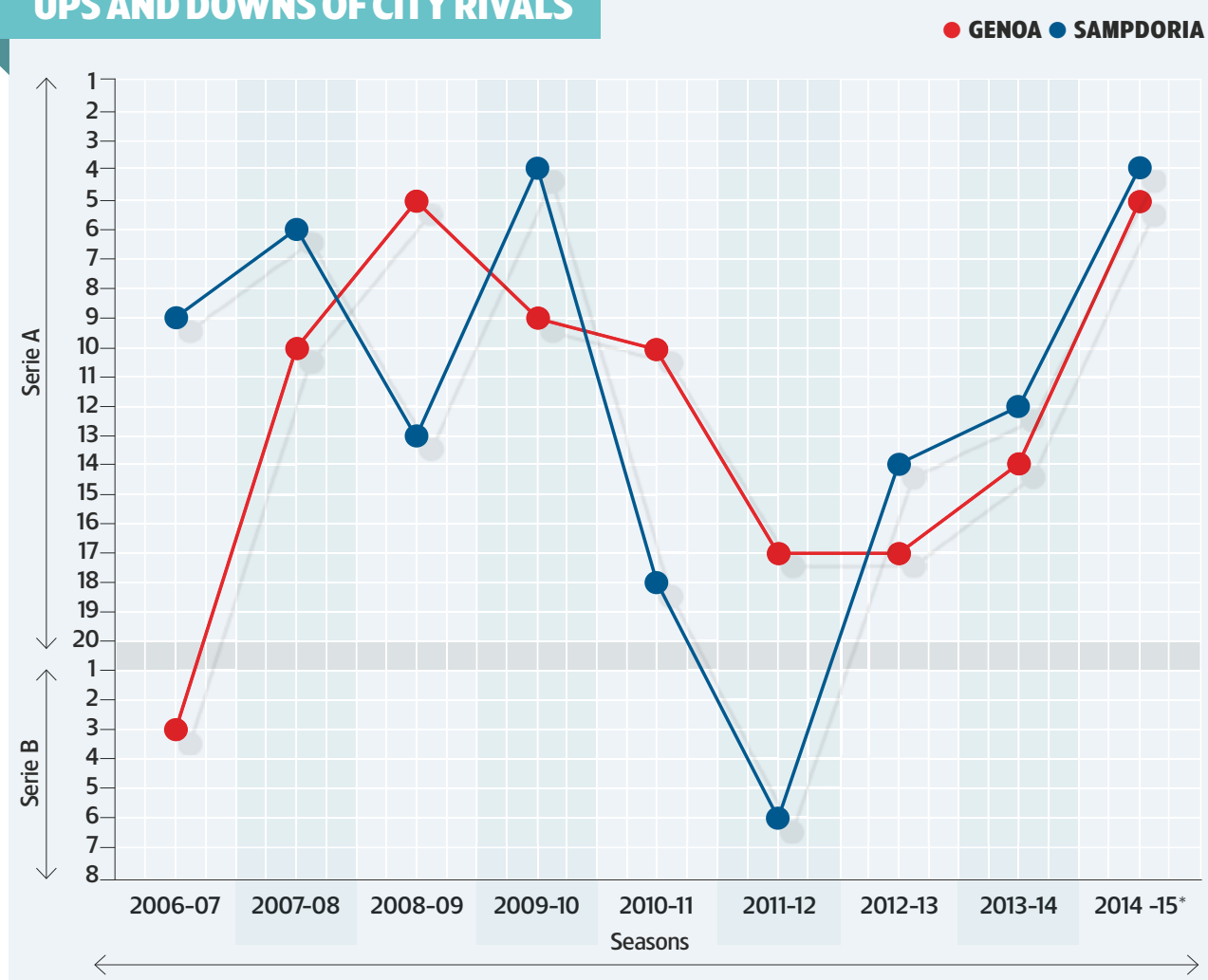
For a start, both have taken points off Juve. By mid-November, the defending champions had dropped just six points, with four of those conceded to Genoa and Sampdoria.

When Genoa won 1-0 at home to Juventus in late October, and Sampdoria held Juve to a 1-1 draw in Turin in November, it could be argued that both teams profited from Juve's Champions League distractions. The Sampdoria draw, for example, came just four days after Juventus had clinched their place in the knockout stage of the Champions League with a 0-0 home draw against Atletico Madrid.

Yet both clubs have hugely talented leaders, in Gian Piero Gasperini at Genoa and Sinisa Mihajlovic at Sampdoria. If Gasperini long ago established himself as a clever coach, in the process winning the admiration of no less a rival than Jose Mourinho in his Inter days, Mihajlovic is more of a surprise.

A favourite of Swedish coach Sven-Goran Eriksson, who took the Serb with him when moving from Sampdoria to Lazio in 1997, Mihajlovic had a well-deserved reputation for being tough and talented as a player, as well as

UPS AND DOWNS OF CITY RIVALS



possessing with an explosive left foot. And as a coach, it would seem that he has quickly learned to put the "tough" side of his character to good use.

His handling of 23-year-old schemer Manolo Gabbiadini during the draw with Juventus makes the point. Gabbiadini is actually a Juventus-owned player currently on loan to Samp, and for that reason he was at the centre of much media fuss before the game. Mihajlovic took all the pressure away from his star player by leaving him on the bench for the entire first half, but then bringing him on at the start of the second. Gabbiadini rewarded his coach with a cracking 51st-minute goal as Samp halted Juve's 25-match Serie A winning run at home.

Not for the first time, Sampdoria proved themselves a modern "bogey" team for Juventus, given that they pulled off a rare double against the champions two seasons ago, winning 2-1 in Turin and 3-2 in Genoa.

But while such results are always going to earn a club plenty of media attention, this season's column inches are just as much due to Samp's dynamic, new owner: movie producer Ferrero.

In a country in which football club presidents rarely hide their eccentric light under a bushel, Ferrero represents a galactic lazer beam.

For a start, on the day last June when he bought the club from the Garrone family – more or less for free, but with €15million of debt – he was plea bargaining a one-year, 10-month sentence for fraudulent bankruptcy in relation to Livingston Energy Flight, an airline charter company. The ebullient Ferrero is nothing if not enthusiastic. After Sampdoria had beaten Genoa 1-0 in the first *Derby della Lanterna* of the season in September, he ran onto the pitch, joining his players in the customary "run and jump" celebrations in front of their fans.

In post-match interviews, he tends to avoid in-depth analysis, preferring instead to shout, "Forza Samp" into the TV camera. When Sky TV presenter Ilaria D'Amico, who is the girlfriend of Juventus and Italy goalkeeper Gigi Buffon, tried to ask Ferrero a question, he cut her short and said: "Whenever you want to make a film, we'll have you starring in a really big film." On another occasion he said he would like to take her to dinner at Ostia, Roma's ancient port.

Ferrero, known as "the little viper" because of his combative attitude and diminutive stature, hardly does a good line in politically correct. After a series of disappointing results for Internazionale, Ferrero confided to a TV reporter he had already told former Inter owner Massimo Moratti that he "should have chased away that Filipino fellow". The "Filipino" in question, of course, was Indonesian media magnate Erick Thohir, to whom Moratti sold a 70 per cent share in Inter in the autumn of 2013.

> "There are too many things happening in Rome at the moment and I'd hate for football to be involved too"
>
> **Genoa president Enrico Preziosi after his side's 1-0 loss to Roma**

Even if Ferrero subsequently apologised for those remarks, he still received a three-month ban and a €10,000 fine from the football federation in early December for his outburst.

Ferrero's opposite number at Genoa, Preziosi, is the owner of the Preziosi toy company. In 2005 he was at the centre of an alleged match-fixing scandal in which he was suspected of having offered money to rivals Venezia to ensure a 3-2 home win. This happened in a classic, last day of the season Serie B game between already-relegated Venezia and a Genoa side who, were battling to win promotion to Serie A. The outcome of the scandal saw Genoa relegated to the third tier as punishment and Preziosi given a four-month sentence for sports fraud.

So when Preziosi recently suggested that Roma's 1-0 win in Genoa in mid-December owed something to the ongoing mafia scandal in the capital city, not everyone lent him a sympathetic ear.

Not that this will stop him from talking or complaining.

Between now and the end of the season, it is likely that a lot more will be heard from both Preziosi and Ferrero. **WS**

Derby day...Genoa's Sebastian De Maio (left) and Stefan Chuka Okaka of Sampdoria

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WorldSoccer AWARDS 2014

The results of our 32nd annual awards, plus – in a special end-of-year feature – we turn the spotlight on the personalities who helped shape the game in 2014

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PLUS

WorldSoccer PEOPLE of the YEAR

64

Ronaldo's individual brilliance shines through again

Cristiano Ronaldo is *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year for the second year running after a brilliant 12 months for Real Madrid, who won their 10th European Cup in May, with the Portuguese forward scoring in the 4-1 victory over Atletico Madrid in the Final in Lisbon.

Ronaldo, who won the award in 2008 while playing for Manchester United, saw off competition from several of Germany's victorious World Cup side, as well as his La Liga rival, Argentina star Lionel Messi, who finished in third place.

Four members of Germany's national side – goalkeeper Manuel Neuer (2nd), forward Thomas Muller (5th), captain Philipp Lahm (6th) and midfielder Toni Kroos (10th) – finished in the top 10 in our annual poll, which is now in its 32nd year.

There was also recognition for Arjen Robben (4th), the star of the Holland side that finished third at the World Cup;, Colombian starlet James Rodriguez (7th), former Liverpool striker Luis Suarez (8th) and Argentina winger Angel Di Maria (9th).

Germany, not surprisingly, claimed the World Team of the Year award, after their victory over Argentina in the World Cup Final and an extraordinary 7-1 demolition of Brazil in the semi-final. Their coach Joachim Low is World Manager of the Year, finishing ahead of Diego Simeone of Atletico Madrid.

The awards were decided by votes from a panel of more than 100 journalists and pundits from around the globe. Members of the panel chose their top 10 players of the year, with points (ranging from one to 10) awarded to each selection.

For full details of how the panel voted, go to worldsoccer.com/awards.

Results

WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR 2014

1	**CRISTIANO RONALDO** Real Madrid & Portugal	928 points
2	**MANUEL NEUER** Bayern Munich & Germany	789
3	**LIONEL MESSI** Barcelona & Argentina	593
4	**ARJEN ROBBEN** Bayern Munich & Holland	458
5	**THOMAS MULLER** Bayern Munich & Germany	354
6	**PHILIPP LAHM** Bayern Munich & Germany	264
7	**JAMES RODRIGUEZ** Monaco/Real Madrid & Colombia	243
8	**LUIS SUAREZ** Liverpool/Barcelona & Uruguay	218
9	**ANGEL DI MARIA** Real Madrid/Manchester United & Argentina	183
10	**TONI KROOS** Bayern Munich/Real Madrid & Germany	168
11	**NEYMAR** Barcelona & Brazil	166
12	**DIEGO COSTA** Atletico Madrid/Chelsea & Spain	146
13	**ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC** Paris Saint-Germain & Sweden	138
14	**SERGIO AGUERO** Manchester City & Spain	79
15	**GARETH BALE** Real Madrid & Wales	78
16	**SERGIO RAMOS** Real Madrid & Spain	69
17	**BASTIAN SCHWEINSTEIGER** Bayern Munich & Germany	61
18	**YAYA TOURE** Manchester City & Ivory Coast	56
19	**JAVIER MASCHERANO** Barcelona & Argentina	39
20	**DIEGO GODIN** Atletico Madrid & Uruguay	35
21=	**THIBAUT COURTOIS** Atletico Madrid/Chelsea & Belgium	33
21=	**EDEN HAZARD** Chelsea & Belgium	33
23	**MARIO GOTZE** Bayern Munich & Germany	32
24	**KARIM BENZEMA** Real Madrid & France	29
25	**ALEXIS SANCHEZ** Barcelona/Arsenal & Chile	28
26	**FRANCK RIBERY** Bayern Munich & France	26
27	**ANDRES INIESTA** Barcelona & Spain	25
28	**PAUL POGBA** Juventus & France	19
29	**LUKA MODRIC** Real Madrid & Croatia	17
30=	**VINCENT KOMPANY** Manchester City & Belgium	14
30=	**CARLOS TEVEZ** Juventus & Argentina	14
32	**XABI ALONSO** Real Madrid/Bayern Munich & Spain	12
33=	**MATS HUMMELS** Borussia Dortmund & Germany	11
33=	**ANDREA PIRLO** Juventus & Italy	11
35	**KOKE** Atletico Madrid & Spain	10
36	**ARDA TURAN** Atletico Madrid & Turkey	9
37=	**ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI** Borussia Dortmund/Bayern Munich & Poland	7
37=	**PABLO ZABALETA** Manchester City & Argentina	7
39=	**VINCENT ENYEAMA** Lille & Nigeria	6
39=	**HECTOR HERREA** Porto & Mexico	6
41=	**WAYNE ROONEY** Manchester United & England	5
41=	**XAVI HERNANDEZ** Barcelona & Spain	5
43=	**GIANCAARLO GONZALEZ** Columbus Crew/Palermo & Costa Rica	4
43=	**MESUT OZIL** Arsenal & Germany	4
43=	**THIAGO SILVA** Paris Saint-Germain & Brazil	4
43=	**ANDRIY YARMOLENKO** Dynamo Kiev & Ukraine	4
47=	**ALI ASHFAQ** PDRM (Mly) & Maldives	3
47=	**CESC FABREGAS** Barcelona/Chelsea & Spain	3
47=	**IVAN RAKITIC** Sevilla/Barcelona & Croatia	3
47=	**RAPHAEL VARANE** Real Madrid & France	3
47=	**DANIEL STURRIDGE** Liverpoool & England	3
47=	**ROBIN VAN PERSIE** Manchester United & Holland	3
53=	**YACINE BRAHIMI** Porto & Algeria	2
53=	**LUCIANO FIGUEROA** Johor Darul Takzim (Mly)	2
53=	**KEYLOR NAVAS** Levante/Real Madrid & Costa Rica	2
53=	**ARTURO VIDAL** Juventus & Chile	2
57=	**DAVID ALABA** Bayern Munich & Austria	1
57=	**SEAMUS COLEMAN** Everton & Republic of Ireland	1
57=	**MARCO REUS** Borussia Dortmund & Germany	1
57=	**RAHEEM STERLING** Liverpool & England	1

WORLD MANAGER OF THE YEAR 2014

1	**JOACHIM LOW** Germany	45 points
2	**DIEGO SIMEONE** Atletico Madrid	33
3	**CARLO ANCELOTTI** Real Madrid	15
4	**LOUIS VAN GAAL** Holland/Manchester Utd	5
5	**PEP GUARDIOLA** Bayern Munich	3
6=	**TONY POPOVIC** Western Sydney Wanderers	1
6=	**JOSE LUIS PINTO** Costa Rica	1

WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR 2014

1	**GERMANY**	65 points
2	**REAL MADRID**	23
3	**ATLETICO MADRID**	11
4=	**BAYERN MUNICH**	1
4=	**COLOMBIA**	1
4=	**COSTA RICA**	1
4=	**WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS**	1

Cristiano **Ronaldo**

World Player of the year: The inspiration behind *la decima*, Real Madrid's 10th European Cup

There was a moment during pre-season training in the USA this summer when Cristiano Ronaldo picked up the ball, sprinted past an opponent and thumped a shot into the net, before turning to the bench as if to say: "Did you see that?" On the bench were Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, and club president Florentino Perez. And, yes, they had seen it. Ancelotti shrugged and smiled. What can you do? The answer, Ronaldo hoped, was: play him, of course.

Madrid's season was about to start and Ronaldo was determined to play. The club wanted to be cautious, doctors had advised them to take things slowly, and Ancelotti tried to reign Ronaldo in. But there he was, out to prove he was ready. And when he does things like that, it's hard to argue. Ronaldo's ambition remains limitless, the appetite voracious.

In the closing weeks of last season, Ronaldo was not fully fit and he was unable to make the impact he would have liked on the World Cup. He scored just one goal, against Ghana, and Portugal went out in the group stage. His World Cup record reads three goals: one in 2006, a penalty against Iran, when he was named the tournament's best young player; one in 2010 against North Korea, the seventh in a 7-0 win; and that one against Ghana. At times against the USA this summer it was hard to watch, yet it was impressive too; he could hardly move, yet he still provided a stunning cross for the goal.

> **"If he carries on like this, he could become the best player ever"**
>
> **Former Real Madrid striker Raul**

Perhaps he should have stopped, but he wouldn't stop. He had missed the Spanish Cup Final and he was not going to miss any more games, playing through the pain, determined. He scored in the Champions League Final; the *decima* had arrived, in Lisbon. And although Brazil will have hurt Ronaldo, not least because it may prove to be his last World Cup, it is a measure of just how brilliant he has been over the last 12 months that it did not count against him in *World Soccer*'s vote – it is rare indeed for our winner in a World Cup year to not be a World Cup winner.

Besides, success in Lisbon will never be taken from him. Moreover, he had been the tournament's top scorer, setting a new Champions League record, and Brazil would also have made him even more determined to leave it behind this season, to prove he is still the world's best player. And so there he was back for the start of a new season, belting in goals in front of his coach and proving a point.

Ronaldo was still not quite ready, though, and three weeks in he was forced to miss the game at Real Sociedad – Madrid lost – and dedicate a fortnight to getting fit. When he came back, he immediately scored...and he hasn't stopped since.

If the ambition can at times be problematic, it is what makes Cristiano Ronaldo what he is. The relentless pursuit of more, and more, and more, lies behind his success. When he collected the ESM Golden Shoe, Ronaldo announced that he aspires to be the best player in history. He means it, too. And even if he does not make it, the pursuit will provide the impetus to keep on improving.

Ronaldo does not want anything, or anyone, to get in his way. Gerard Pique recently described him as a "machine". It was seen by some as a backhanded compliment but it is the ultimate compliment.

"If he wins the World Player award, it will be almost boring," said Thomas Muller. That too is a compliment: Ronaldo never gets bored. The pursuit of perfection, the constant pushing of the boundaries, the fine tuning, drive him. He can always do more. He is the world's best player, convinced of his talent, but he works like a player who thinks he is no good and must try harder than all the rest.

Driven...the ambition of the Portuguese remains limitless

Glory...Ronaldo in the Champions League Final

Ronaldo's success has not fallen into his lap; the physique and the technique have been worked on, over and over. His game has evolved and become more complete, just as his body has changed. He has kept on improving and learning; even those who cannot bring themselves to like him cannot help but admire him. Even his team-mates, professionals at the top of their game, think he is different.

"He really manages himself well, really well," says Paul Clement, Real Madrid's

assistant coach. "I remember one game where we came back at three in the morning and he went to have an ice bath. Another example: six in the morning, we had come back from Istanbul and there's the physio giving him a rub down."

"It's hard to know what to say about him," Carlo Ancelotti admits. "We're going to have to invent new words to describe him," claims Sergio Ramos. The solution is to turn to the figures. The trouble is that by the time you have written them down, they have changed; records fall weekly.

Last season, Ronaldo was Europe's top scorer in the league, joint-winner of the ESM Golden Shoe with Luis Suarez, as well as the Champions League's top scorer. This season, finally forced to rest and start again, he returned and scored goal after goal. He did not want to waste any more time. For the fourth year in a row he has scored over 60 goals for club and country.

So far this season Ronaldo has scored 25 times in the league. That's enough goals to have been La Liga's top scorer 42 times, more than half the league seasons ever – with 23 games still to play.

Sid Lowe

DID YOU KNOW

By the time La Liga took its Christmas break this season, Ronaldo had scored more goals than Lionel Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez all put together.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1982	**PAOLO ROSSI** Juventus & Italy
1983	**ZICO** Udinese & Brazil
1984	**MICHEL PLATINI** Juventus & France
1985	**MICHEL PLATINI** Juventus & France
1986	**DIEGO MARADONA** Napoli & Argentina
1987	**RUUD GULLIT** Milan & Holland
1988	**MARCO VAN BASTEN** Milan & Holland
1989	**RUUD GULLIT** Milan & Holland
1990	**LOTHAR MATTHAUS** Internazionale & West Germany
1991	**JEAN-PIERRE PAPIN** Marseille & France
1992	**MARCO VAN BASTEN** Milan & Holland
1993	**ROBERTO BAGGIO** Juventus & Italy
1994	**PAOLO MALDINI** Milan & Italy
1995	**GIANLUCA VIALLI** Juventus & Italy
1996	**RONALDO** Barcelona & Brazil
1997	**RONALDO** Barcelona/Internazionale & Brazil
1998	**ZINEDINE ZIDANE** Juventus & France
1999	**RIVALDO** Barcelona & Brazil
2000	**LUIS FIGO** Barcelona/Real Madrid & Portugal
2001	**MICHAEL OWEN** Liverpool & England
2002	**RONALDO** Internazionale/Real Madrid & Brazil
2003	**PAVEL NEDVED** Juventus & Czech Republic
2004	**RONALDINHO** Barcelona & Brazil
2005	**RONALDINHO** Barcelona & Brazil
2006	**FABIO CANNAVARO** Juventus/Real Madrid & Italy
2007	**KAKA** Milan & Brazil
2008	**CRISTIANO RONALDO** Manchester United & Portugal
2009	**LIONEL MESSI** Barcelona & Argentina
2010	**XAVI** Barcelona & Spain
2011	**LIONEL MESSI** Barcelona & Argentina
2012	**LIONEL MESSI** Barcelona & Argentina
2013	**CRISTIANO RONALDO** Real Madrid & Portugal

CRISTIANO RONALDO:

A year in goals

(All goals in La Liga, except where stated: **CL** Champions League, **SC** Spanish Cup, **USC** UEFA Super Cup, **ECQ** European Championship qualifier, **F** Friendly, **WC** World Cup. Does not include 2015 Club World Cup)

1 Jan 6 v Celta Vigo

2 Jan 6 v Celta Vigo

3 Jan 15 v Osasuna (SC)

4 Jan 18 v Real Betis

5 Jan 25 v Granada

11 Mar 5 v Cameroon (F)

12 Mar 5 v Cameroon (F)

13 Mar 9 v Levante

14 Mar 15 v Malaga

15 Mar 18 v Schalke (CL)

21 Apr 26 v Osasuna

22 Apr 26 v Osasuna

23 Apr 29 v Bayern Munich (CL)

24 Apr 29 v Bayern Munich (CL)

25 May 4 v Valencia

29 Aug 12 v Sevilla (USC)

30 Aug 25 v Cordoba

31 Sep 13 v Atletico Madrid

32 Sep 16 v Basle (CL)

33 Sep 20 v Deportivo La Coruna

36 Sep 23 v Elche

41 Oct 1 v Ludogorets (CL)

45 Oct 14 v Denmark (ECQ)

46 Oct 18 v Levante

47 Oct 18 v Levante

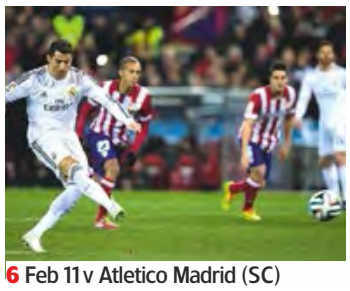
48 Oct 22 v Liverpool (CL)

54 Nov 22 v Eibar

55 Nov 26 v Basle (CL)

56 Dec 6 v Celta Vigo

57 Dec 6 v Celta Vigo


6 Feb 11 v Atletico Madrid (SC)

7 Feb 11 v Atletico Madrid (SC)

8 Feb 26 v Schalke (CL)

9 Feb 26 v Schalke (CL)

10 Mar 2 v Atletico Madrid

16 Mar 18 v Schalke (CL)

17 Mar 23 v Barcelona

18 Mar 26 v Sevilla

19 Mar 29 v Rayo Vallecano

20 Apr 2 v Borussia Dortmund (CL)

#26
May 24 v Atletico Madrid (CL)

27 Jun 26 v Ghana (WC)

28 Aug 12 v Sevilla (USC)

34 Sep 20 v Deportivo La Coruna

35 Sep 20 v Deportivo La Coruna

37 Sep 23 v Elche

38 Sep 23 v Elche

#39
Sep 23
v Elche

40 Sep 27 v Villarreal

42 Oct 5 v Athletic Bilbao

43 Oct 5 v Athletic Bilbao

44 Oct 5 v Athletic Bilbao

#49
Oct 25
v Barcelona

50 Nov 1 v Granada

51 Nov 8 v Rayo Vallecano

52 Nov 14 v Armenia (ECQ)

53 Nov 22 v Eibar

58 Dec 6 v Celta Vigo

59 Dec 9 v Ludogorets (CL)

60 Dec 12 v Almeria

#61
61 Dec 12 v Almeria

Germany

World Team of the Year Deserved world champions on South American soil

Whatever the angle of inquiry, whatever the criteria, newly decorated world champions Germany stood head and shoulders above the rest of the field at Brazil 2014.

The *Nationalmannschaft* were the most cohesive collectively and boasted the best individuals in goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, centre-backs Mats Hummels and Jerome Boateng, skipper and utility man Philipp Lahm, engine-room brains Toni Kroos and hyperactive top marksman Thomas Muller. They scored more goals than anyone (18), conceded just four and forever will remain in the record books after their stunning 7-1 demolition of Brazil in that never-to-be-forgotten semi-final in Belo Horizonte.

Any side capable of overcoming Portugal, USA, Algeria, France, hosts Brazil and, in the Final, Argentina – and doing so in South America's football heartlands – has to have an awful lot going for it. Just like Germany's other World Cup-winning squads of 1954, 1974 and 1990, immortality deservedly awaits.

The team so shrewdly assembled by coach Joachim Low might not have been an ensemble of show-stopping flamboyance but they were undoubtedly the cleverest and most resourceful in Brazil – even able to absorb the massive blow of losing Marco Reus with a damaged ankle on the eve of the finals.

Making full use of the meticulous opposition-scouting reports compiled by chief analyst Urs Siegenthaler and his tireless team of number crunchers and IT experts, the Germans went into every World Cup match with a specific game plan – and it says everything about the players' discipline and adaptability that each blueprint was respected to the letter.

Whether ruthlessly picking apart the hapless Brazilians on the counter-attack or stifling the life out of France in the quarter-finals with a deliberate, slow-paced possession game, the Germans not only had award-winning screenplays to work with but also the word-perfect Oscar actors to bring them to life.

Before the finals, a constant theme in the German media was Low's side's inability to deliver when it mattered most. But no one is pushing the "choker" slur now.

After many years of all-out attacking football – and occasional back-line lapses – the team he sent onto the pitch in Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Salvador, Fortaleza and Recife was a considerably more pragmatic unit; far better organised at the back, stronger in the air when defending corners and generally more canny.

With "sweeper-keeper" Neuer outstanding, Boateng and Hummels imperious at the heart of defence, and Sami Khedira and Bastian Schweinsteiger returning from injury to efficiently screen the rearguard, Low at last had a solid defensive platform on which to build. Technical, creative, patient, physically imposing, hard to break down and mentally tough, Germany had the perfect mix.

Further proof of a more balanced, hard-headed approach was the five goals they plundered from corners and free-kicks. Realising the heat and humidity in certain venues would make it impossible to sustain their high-tempo style, Siegenthaler put the idea to Low that good set-piece work could make all the difference. Although Low needed some convincing he ultimately relented, allowing assistant Hansi Flick to put on extra dead-ball sessions.

During most of Low's reign, set-piece goals had proved as rare as hen's teeth. But practice makes perfect. Look at the second goal in the 4-0 win over Portugal, the 2-2 equaliser versus Ghana, the only

DID YOU KNOW?

All 18 of the goals that Germany scored in the 2014 World Cup finals came from inside the penalty area.

"He is the wonder, the decider who can come on and make all the difference. That is what he did"

Coach Joachim Low salutes Final match-winner Mario Gotze

Champions...Germany start the celebrations in Rio de Janeiro

goal of the games against USA and France and Muller's opener in the semi-final.

Then there was the bench. In sapping conditions, the second-half introduction of fresh-legged dynamism often can be the trump card. Low's choice of impact substitutions invariably turned out to be inspired, with Mario Gotze volleying home an exquisite winner in the Final and Andre Schurrle coming on to net three times in the knock-out phase.

That's Germany. All the bases covered and always looking for the edge. Standing still is not an option at the DFB.

NIck Bidwell

Set-piece reward...Muller puts Germany ahead in the semi-final demolition of Brazil

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1982	BRAZIL
1983	HAMBURG
1984	FRANCE

Cup-winners Cup success...Everton

1985	EVERTON
1986	ARGENTINA
1987	PORTO
1988	HOLLAND
1989	MILAN
1990	WEST GERMANY
1991	FRANCE
1992	DENMARK
1993	PARMA
1994	MILAN
1995	AJAX
1996	NIGERIA
1997	BORUSSIA DORTMUND
1998	FRANCE
1999	MANCHESTER UNITED
2000	FRANCE
2001	LIVERPOOL
2002	BRAZIL
2003	MILAN

Against the odds...unfancied Greece become European champions

2004	GREECE
2005	LIVERPOOL
2006	BARCELONA
2007	SPAIN
2008	SPAIN
2009	BARCELONA
2010	SPAIN
2011	BARCELONA
2012	SPAIN
2013	BAYERN MUNICH

Joachim **Low**

World Manager of the Year Recognition for long-term architect of World Cup success

A sacking 10 years ago turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to Germany's smoothly successful coach Joachim Low.

As "Jogi" himself admits, if he had not been fired by Austria Vienna in the spring of 2004, his big break with the German national side a few months later would probably not have come to pass – and he would have missed out on the career-defining chain of events that propelled him from influential *Nationalmannschaft* right-hand man to Jurgen Klinsmann, to long-serving *Bundestrainer* and 2014 World Cup winner.

Germany's triumph in Brazil, their first global crown in 24 long and frustrating years, left Low experiencing every emotion known to man. Not only the euphoria, satisfaction and pride of the ultimate mission accomplished, but also a great deal of relief that after six years of near misses – defeat at the semi-final stage of the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012, and European championship silver in 2008 – he had finally landed a top prize.

While it may seem harsh to outsiders, winning is all that matters in the unforgiving universe of the German national team. And with his side making a habit of running out of steam in the final straight of tournaments, Low inevitably found himself a marked man; he was hammered for tactical tinkering, too little defensive organisation and a lack of killer instinct.

Prior to the unforgettable 7-1 thumping of Brazil last summer, Low's lot generally was to be unappreciated and undermined. Throughout his squad's pre-World Cup training camp in Austria there was constant press speculation that he would be quitting after the tournament. And even in Brazil the knives were out, with some reporters suggesting that the Germans had reached the semis in spite of their coach.

In the face of such hostility some would lose will and focus. But not Low.

Underpinning his poetic footballing ideals is a steely resolve to go his own way, and drawing his inner circle of allies – number two Hansi Flick, chief scout Urs Siegenthaler, business manager Oliver Bierhoff and head doctor Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt – ever closer, he simply ignored the media, only appearing in two press conferences during five weeks of the World Cup.

Thorough, rational and innovative, Low never wavered in his belief that it was only a matter of time before his squad paraded a trophy, and to this end the battle plan he and his associates drew up for Brazil was nothing short of a work of art.

Climatic and medical homework: check. Purpose-built squad HQ in Bahia state: check. More attention to set-pieces: check. Plenty of impact substitutes: check.

> "The 2014 World Cup was a highlight for all, but it was not a conclusion"
>
> **Joachim Low**

"We were together for 55 days in our World Cup campaign, but the project to win it started many years previously," explained Low. "During all this time, we've constantly grown and despite some defeats, have always made small steps in the right direction."

Jogi Low 1, The Media 0. "I quickly realised I could only be convincing if I followed my own intuition," he told *Die Zeit* newspaper before the tournament.

Good instincts. Even better coach.

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

AGE 54 (03.02.60)
COACHING CAREER Stuttgart (1996-98), Fenerbahce (1998-99), Karlsruher (1999-2000), Adanaspor (2001), Tirol Innsbruck (2001-02), Austria Vienna (2003-04), Germany assistant coach (2004-06), Germany (2006-present)
HONOURS German Cup 1997, Austrian Bundesliga 2002, Austrian Super Cup 2003, World Cup 2014

Leading the way...Low has extended his contract with the German national side until 2016

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1982	**ENZO BEARZOT** Italy
1983	**SEPP PIONTEK** Denmark
1984	**MICHEL HIDALGO** France
1985	**TERRY VENABLES** Barcelona
1986	**GUY THYS** Belgium
1987	**JOHAN CRUYFF** Ajax
1988	**RINUS MICHELS** Holland/Bayer Leverkusen
1989	**ARRIGO SACCHI** Milan
1990	**FRANZ BECKENBAUER** West Germany
1991	**MICHEL PLATINI** France
1992	**RICHARD MOLLER NIELSEN** Denmark
1993	**ALEX FERGUSON** Manchester United
1994	**CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA** Brazil
1995	**LOUIS VAN GAAL** Ajax
1996	**BERTI VOGTS** Germany
1997	**OTTMAR HITZFELD** Borussia Dortmund
1998	**ARSENE WENGER** Arsenal
1999	**ALEX FERGUSON** Manchester United
2000	**DINO ZOFF** Italy
2001	**GERARD HOULLIER** Liverpool
2002	**GUUS HIDDINK** South Korea
2003	**CARLO ANCELOTTI** Milan
2004	**JOSE MOURINHO** Porto/Chelsea
2005	**JOSE MOURINHO** Chelsea
2006	**MARCELLO LIPPI** Italy
2007	**ALEX FERGUSON** Manchester United
2008	**ALEX FERGUSON** Manchester United
2009	**PEP GUARDIOLA** Barcelona
2010	**JOSE MOURINHO** Internazionale/Real Madrid
2011	**PEP GUARDIOLA** Barcelona
2012	**VICENTE DEL BOSQUE** Spain
2013	**JUPP HEYNCKES** Bayern Munich

Jorge **Mendes**

The Portuguese businessman was football's biggest deal maker in 2014

Jorge Mendes' rise from small-time Porto entrepreneur to star maker in football's multi-millionaire transfer market reflects the game's 20-year moneyed transformation. And in 2014 his work reached a new zenith.

For years Mendes was unassailably dominant in Portugal as an exporter of footballers, and the agent to Jose Mourinho – who has signed Mendes' players at all his clubs. For the past 12 months the "super agent" seemed almost to be orchestrating the line-ups of Europe's top teams.

Last summer's biggest deals were all Mendes brokered, such is his influence. Two of the players in headline moves had been bought by Monaco for massive fees – also negotiated by Mendes – just a year earlier. James Rodriguez had gone from Porto to the club in the tax haven on the Cote d'Azur, where Russian billionaire Dmitri Rybolovlev briefly seemed to fancy doing a Roman Abramovich, for £36million. Radamel Falcao was signed by Monaco for £52m, two years after his £32m move to Atletico Madrid from Porto – which Mendes also brokered.

Porto publicly declares the fees it pays to agents in "intermediation service costs", and stated in its annual report that it paid Mendes' company, Gestifute, £3.6m when Rodriguez left, and split £3m with another agency, Orel, on the Falcao sale.

> "Portugal is a small country where people who do well are the target of envy. You struggle against the tide"
>
> **Jorge Mendes on his rise to riches**

A year on, the continental plates had shifted. Rybolovlev was realising just how much a galactico policy could cost him, together with the new financial fairplay limitations, and the Glazers' Manchester United had been startled by the David Moyes slump into realising they had to make some A-list signings. Rodriguez excelled at the World Cup, volleying himself onto Real Madrid's shopping list, and went to the Bernabeu for a staggering £71m. Falcao subsequently joined the new roster at Old Trafford on a highly expensive loan.

Angel Di Maria really signalled the end of the Glazers' thrift policy, which Alex Ferguson had spun miraculously into silverware, United blitzing their previous transfer limit with a fee of almost £60m for a genuine international star allowed to leave Real Madrid.

Photographers loitering outside United's Carrington training ground down that long Cheshire farm track snapped Mendes, grinning, making people happy – the clubs, the player and the new manager Louis Van Gaal – in the back of a car taking Di Maria to his new employer.

The other biggest Premier League deals were also sealed by Mendes: Eliaquim Mangala, the strong centre-half signed by Sheikh Mansour's Manchester City for £32m – from Porto again – and Diego Costa, Atletico Madrid's coveted goalscorer, brought by Abramovich to Chelsea for the same figure.

FACT FILE

AGE 48 (07.01.66)
CLIENTS include Jose Mourinho, Luiz Felipe Scolari, Carlos Queiroz, Cristiano Ronaldo, Radamel Falcao, Joao Moutinho, James Rodriguez, David De Gea and Víctor Valdes

A-list client...Mendes brokered Falcao's moves

The fees Mendes earned on these deals are not known and will not be declared by anyone except Porto, nor will the work for which he earned them be explained. Was he acting for the players, negotiating their stratospheric earnings, or for the clubs, to seal the deal? And is there really any difference between those roles any more? The Porto classification of his services, "intermediation," seems to communicate clearly the modern reality of agents.

Mendes has also been deeply involved with third-party ownership of players' actual economic rights, acting as advisor with former Chelsea chief executive, Peter Kenyon, to funds in the Quality Sports group, which buys stakes for investors promised a 32 per cent annual profit.

A prospectus seeking to raise cash in Gibraltar, a tax haven, for one of the funds, Quality Sports V Investments LP, registered in Jersey – another tax haven – boasted to potential investors of Mendes' unrivalled influence, particularly in Portugal. It stated that in the decade to 2010 he conducted transfers worth 78 per cent of Sporting Lisbon's total earnings of £70m, 51 per cent of Benfica's £85m deals, and 70 per cent of the £189m transfers at the much more productive Porto. Altogether, the document said, Mendes had been involved in 68 per cent of the transfer business done by Portugal's three big clubs during those years of the country's players leaving to populate teams across Europe.

That dominance endures, but having first taken Cristiano Ronaldo to Manchester United in 2003, then to Real Madrid for £80m six years later, Mendes' deal-making has extended beyond his home base. This year he bestrode the heights, making untold fortunes.

There is no sign his influence is waning – in fact, quite the opposite.

David Conn

Phaedra **Almajid** & Bonita **Mersiades**

Whistle-blowers angered by treatment in Garcia's FIFA investigation

No doubt about it, "The Establishment" – in political, industrial and sports circles – has no love of whistle-blowers.

Phaedra Almajid and Bonita Mersiades are merely the latest two victims to discover this, with their contributions to Michael Garcia's World Cup bid scandal inquiry having been traduced publicly by ethics judge Hans-Joachim Eckert.

Maybe, as whistle-blowers, they should not have been surprised in a chauvinistic world such as international football governance. FIFA, after all, has only recently been forced to accept the tokenism of women on its executive committee.

Almajid and Mersiades were lumped together by Eckert in his 42-page summary of Garcia's substantive report even though the context of their evidence, submitted with guarantees of anonymity, was very different.

Mersiades led communications for the Australian bid but was sacked after falling out with the CEO, Ben Buckley, over the contracting of consultants, including long-time FIFA fringe player Peter Hargitay. Part of the strategy to which Mersiades objected was the obsequious pursuit of then CONCACAF president Jack Warner through the flimsy use of "development support".

Almajid, an Arab-American, was employed by the Qatar bid between May 2009 and March 2010 as international media specialist and worked closely with chief executive Hassan Al Thawadi. She was sacked abruptly after an international interview with bid ambassador Gabriel Batistuta backfired.

Almajid subsequently alleged that Qatar had offered bribes to FIFA executive committee members Issa Hayatou, Jacques Anouma and Amos Adamu, and had offered financial support for the Argentinian federation, led by Julio Grondona, FIFA's senior vice-president.

In July 2011 she retracted her comments and submitted formal statements of apology.

However, Almajid later told Garcia that she had issued the retraction under duress and stood by her original version.

Both women talked to Garcia on condition of confidentiality. But they were the only two of the 70-plus witnesses who were rendered identifiable by Eckert in his summary. He did not name names, but by merely referring to them as whistle-blowers in relation to the two bids he opened up their identities to anyone with access to the Google search engine.

Why Eckert projected these two for easy reference was not merely unclear but also reprehensible, given that basic professional judicial conduct should have made him far more circumspect.

Almajid and Mersiades registered a joint complaint to FIFA's disciplinary committee without success. Almajid duly raged that she felt "betrayed and denigrated for being courageous enough to come forward with critical information".

She added: "My co-operation was based on your [FIFA and Garcia's] promise of confidentiality. You have said that, 'in the course of any investigation, [you are] bound by confidentiality', and 'also want to protect anyone who would wish to come to me in good faith'."

This may not be – nor should it be – the end of the matter. Eckert, Garcia and FIFA president Sepp Blatter may one day have cause to recall the words of 17th-century English playwright and poet William Congreve: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

Keir Radnedge

DID YOU KNOW

Burundi Football Association president Lydia Nsekera made history in 2012 when she was co-opted onto the FIFA executive committee, on an interim one-year basis, as the ExCo's first-ever female member

> "FIFA is nothing if not predictable and has today surpassed itself in obfuscation and deflection. FIFA's position underscores why we need a new FIFA"
>
> **Bonita Mersiades, after the disciplinary committee rejected her complaint**

Crisis...football's governing body had a bad year

Anonymity blown...Almajid (left) and Mersiades were exposed by Eckert's summary of the report compiled by Garcia

Yacine **Brahimi**

The shining star of Algeria's best-ever World Cup

Despite having just 14 caps for his country, all the signs are that left-winger or second striker Yacine Brahimi will one day be mentioned in the same breath as such icons as Rachid Mekhloufi, Mustapha Zitouni, Lakhdar Belloumi and Rabah Madjer.

Hugely impressive as Algeria reached the knock-out stage of Brazil 2014 – the furthest they have ever gone in the World Cup – and equally electrifying since joining Porto last summer from Spanish outfit Granada, Brahimi was recently voted African Player of the Year in a BBC poll. And on the evidence of the past 12 months, there should be many more honours to come, with January's African Nations Cup an ideal opportunity in which to make his mark.

Born in Paris 24 years ago to Algerian parents, he went to the Clairefontaine school of soccer excellence and was capped by France at youth and under-21 level, but in the spring of 2013 opted to take a different international tack, renouncing "*Les Bleus*" for a future in the green and white of Algeria.

> **"This trophy is going to give me more strength, more desire to work, to get better and to learn, so that I can keep having great performances"**
> **Brahimi on his BBC award as African Player of the Year**

Full credit to the Algerian federation for the persistence they showed in courting him, with three years' worth of persuasion, charm and appeals to sentiment eventually paying off. "In the end, I followed my heart," explains Brahimi. "I'm proud and happy to play for Algeria.

"It took a while because I just wasn't ready. I wasn't an established player. While at Rennes I was held back by a string of injuries and only on signing for Granada did I begin to start regularly. I was in a better place and could join the Algerian squad without any worries."

Rennes must regret their inability to get the best out of young Brahimi. During his two seasons, he started only sporadically and the word was that coach Frederic Antonetti found him too lightweight, too injury prone and too unpredictable.

Granada, who initially brought the Algerian in on a 12-month loan deal in the summer of 2012, would prove to be much more to his liking. Free to express himself, his ball skills, elusiveness and creativity were exactly what the Liga doctor ordered. He ended the season as the most effective dribbler in the Spanish top flight, even outstripping the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Leo Messi, and was rewarded with a permanent contract.

Exceptional in tight spots and able to take on and beat any number of opponents, he has always been technically good. But what he has added to his game of late is greater clarity and composure in the box. Rather than snatching at chances, he now looks much more in control of the situation – and this certainly was the case in September when he scored a hat-trick for Porto in their Champions League victory over BATE.

"I think I'm more determined these days to seal the deal," says Brahimi, who is rumoured to be on the shopping list of Paris Saint-Germain, the club he played for as a boy. "In the past I have not been cool enough. On the training ground, I've been working hard on my finishing.

"I'm always looking to be more efficient for the team."

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

CLUB Porto (Por)
COUNTRY Algeria
AGE 24 (08.02.90)
POSITION Forward
PREVIOUS CLUBS Rennes (Fra), Clermont (Fra, loan), Granada (Spa)
CAPS 14 (4 goals)

Diego **Simeone**

Inspiration behind Atletico's La Liga triumph

At the end of the Champions League Final, Diego Simeone was asked what he was going to do next. The way it had unfolded was cruel, with Sergio Ramos' late, late header denying Atletico Madrid their first-ever European Cup, and against their greatest rivals too.

"I'll watch the World Cup and then begin to prepare the defence of the league title we have just won," he replied.

The response was a pointed one, a message for internal and external consumption. Yes, a European Cup Final loss hurt, and all the more so against their greatest rivals Real Madrid, but no one should forget what Atletico had achieved. And while they had been defeated, this would not sink them.

For years, Atletico had been known as "*el pupas*", the jinxed one, after they lost the 1974 European Cup Final to a freak 40-yard equaliser from Bayern Munich in the last minute. But if people thought the club's bad luck had returned, Simeone thought otherwise.

When the new season started, Atletico beat Real to win the Spanish Super Cup. And then they beat them again in the league. The club that once collapsed at the slightest opportunity, crushed by the inevitability of it all, would no longer surrender. Just like Simeone himself.

> "Atletico Madrid play like Simeone played: tough, focused, and tactically perfect"
>
> **Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti**

Few coaches can have had an impact on a club quite like he has, changing the entire identity of Atletico. They are a team created in his image: an irresistible force, supremely competitive.

When Simeone took over two days before Christmas 2011, they were 10th in La Liga, had been knocked out of the Cup by third-tier Albacete and were in crisis. They had employed 16 coaches since 1996 and, as club captain Gabi put it, they were "mentally sunk".

Simeone pulled them out of the water, reviving them. By the end of the season, Atletico were fifth, narrowly missing out on a Champions League place. They lost just five of their 22 league games and won the Europa League. Then they beat Chelsea in the UEFA Super Cup, qualified for the Champions League and won the Spanish Cup.

On the up...Atletico Madrid players celebrate winning the league title away to Barcelona with coach Simeone

It was not just any old Spanish Cup: they won it at the Santiago Bernabeu against Real – a side they had not beaten for 25 games over a period of 14 years.

In 2011, a banner at the Bernabeu read: "Wanted: a worthy rival for a decent derby. Apply here." From no wins in 25 to two wins in two trips to the Bernabeu, Atletico have now won three of the last four games there. No Atletico boss had ever won three times at Real, let alone in four years.

Victory in the league was, as it turned out, a step towards the title. On the final day of the season, they travelled to Barcelona and won 1-0 in a head-to-head clash for the title.

It was a monumental achievement for a club whose budget is a fifth the size of Madrid and Barcelona's. In two and a half years, a team that was "sunk" had won the Europa League, the European Super Cup, the Spanish Cup, the Spanish league, the Spanish Super Cup.

Yes, they lost in the Champions League Final but, as Simeone insisted, it would be a mistake to forget what they had achieved and an even bigger mistake to expect them to accept their fate. That's not the way they are. Not any more. Not with Simeone.

Sid Lowe

FACT FILE

ESTUDIANTES
Argentinian Primera Apertura 2006
RIVER PLATE
Argentine Primera Clausura 2008
ATLETICO MADRID
Europa League 2012; UEFA Super Cup 2012; La Liga 2014; Spanish Cup 2013; Spanish Super Cup 2014

SERGIO RAMOS
The Real Madrid defender scored an equaliser in the third minute of added time to take the Champions League Final into extra-time and keep his side's dreams of *La Decima* alive. Three further goals in the extra period secured a 4-1 victory over Atletico Madrid.

THIERRY HENRY
The 37-year-old French 1998 World Cup winner retired at the end of a five-season spell in MLS with New York Red Bulls. In the course of a career with Monaco, Juventus, Arsenal and Barcelona, he won league titles in England and Spain, as well as the 2009 Champions League with Barca. His 226 goals for Arsenal, including 175 in the Premier League, made him the club's all-time top scorer, although he is only 43rd in the list of English top-flight scorers.

CARLO ANCELOTTI
The Italian guided Real Madrid to their 10th European Cup in his first season in charge. With Champions League successes in 2003 and 2007 with Milan, he equalled Bob Paisley's record as one of only two men to have won three European Cups.

TIM KRUL
Destined to become a trivia question after he was introduced as a 120th-minute substitute in Holland's World Cup quarter-final against Costa Rica. The Newcastle United goalkeeper, seen as a penalty specialist by coach Louis Van Gaal, saved two spot-kicks to see the Dutch into the last four.

JORGE LUIS PINTO
The Colombian was the mastermind behind Costa Rica's unexpected passage to the World Cup quarter-finals. The *Ticos* were the surprise winners of a tough first-round group alongside three former world champions in England, Italy and Uruguay. They went on to beat Greece on penalties in the round of 16 before taking Holland to extra time in the last eight.

LIONEL MESSI
Although eclipsed by Cristiano Ronaldo in 2014's individual awards, the Barcelona star dragged his country almost single-handedly to the World Cup Final. At Barca, he continued to break records: his Champions League hat-trick over APOEL took his career total in the competition to 74 goals, overtaking the record of Real Madrid's Raul.

Heroes & Villains

Stars of the past 12 months

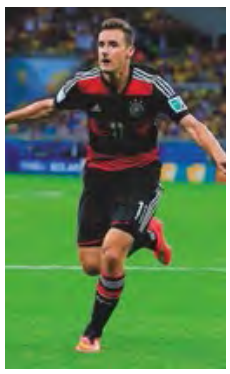
Lest we forget the bad guys...

JAMES RODRIGUEZ
Colombia's World Cup hopes were dealt a severe blow by the injury to Radamel Falcao, but Rodriguez – despite a disappointing season in France with Monaco – inspired his country with some breathtaking goals, none more so than his remarkable volley against Uruguay.

EDGARDO BAUZA
The Argentinian coach led San Lorenzo to their first Libertadores Cup success, defeating Brazilian clubs Gremio and Cruzeiro on the way.

LANDON DONOVAN
The greatest American player of his generation retired on a high, following Los Angeles Galaxy's MLS Cup success. The 32-year-old had announced his intention to retire last summer after being controversially left out of Jurgen Klinsmann's World Cup squad.

MIROSLAV KLOSE
The German striker broke Ronaldo's World Cup scoring record with his 16th tournament goal, scored in his country's remarkable 7-1 victory over Brazil in Belo Horizonte.



JUAN ZUNIGA
The Colombian defender ended Neymar's World Cup with a nasty foul in the back of Brazil's number 10 during their quarter-final meeting, depriving the World Cup of its star performer.

NASSER AL SHAMRANI
The Al Hilal forward scored 10 goals for his Saudi club in the Asian Champions League but lost in the Final and attacked an opponent. He was banned for eight games but, in an embarrassing episode for the AFC, was also named as its Player of the Year.

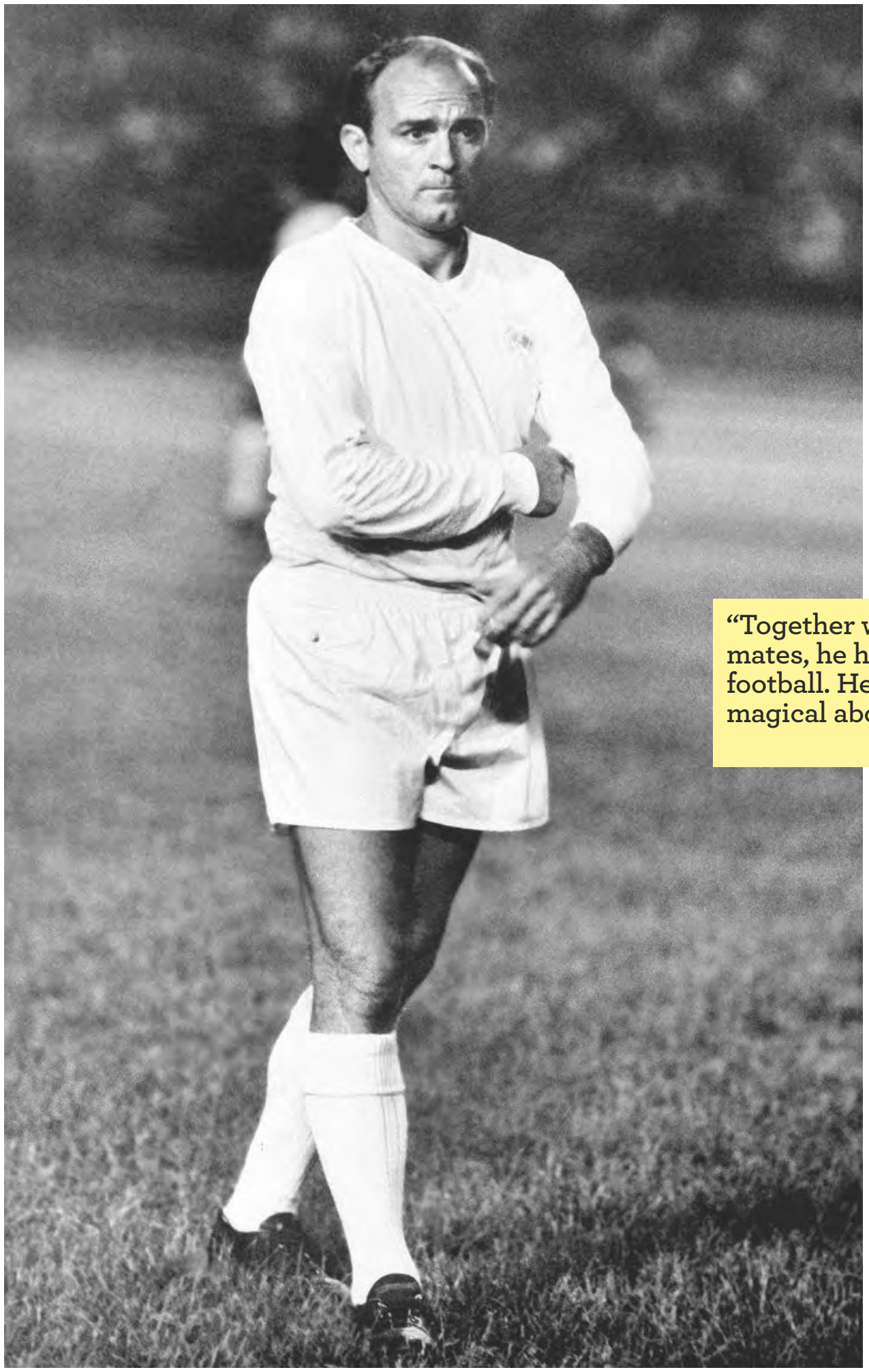
DAVE WHELAN
The Wigan Athletic owner hired Malky Mackay as his new manager soon after the former Cardiff City boss had been forced out of football following a row over racist, sexist and homophobic text messages. He then used racist language himself in an interview in which he tried to defend Mackay.

CHUCK BLAZER
The former CONCACAF general secretary and FIFA ExCo member was revealed to have turned FBI informant in return for immunity from prosecution for tax offences committed while running CONCACAF. Blazer was reportedly to have lived the high life on expenses, although a $6,000-a-month apartment for his "unruly cats" at the Trump Tower was actually occupied by his girlfriend and her teenage children.

BRAZIL'S DEFENCE
Without suspended captain Thiago Silva, a back four of Maicon, David Luiz, Dante and Marcelo concededs seven goals to Germany in Brazilian football's most humiliating defeat of all time.

Alfredo **Di Stefano**

The most influential footballer of all time



Alfredo Di Stefano was unique. His career spanned eras which linked football's yesteryear, its today and its tomorrow. Though he died last July his legacy stands supreme because, as a footballer, he was both of his time and ahead of his time.

Di Stefano knew it. He did not do false modesty. But, even in his latter years, growing increasingly grumpy with journalists whose enthusiastic youth betrayed what he considered a lack of insight, he never lost his appreciation of the game.

Not for "Don Alfredo" the chip-on-the-shoulder envy of today's players, their fame and their earnings. He was satisfied, in his way, to see the goal-laden manner in which Cristiano Ronaldo picked up the mantle of arrogant showmanship laid down by "his" Madrid of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Di Stefano grew up in football in the 1940s. His father played for River Plate during the amateur v professional "war" of the early 1930s, when the two rival championships ran simultaneously. He moved his family to a farm, and legend has it the young Alfredo built up his phenomenal stamina running from farm to city and back again.

> "Together with his gifted team-mates, he helped invent modern football. He embodied all that is magical about football"
>
> **Michel Platini on Di Stefano**

He, too, played for River Plate in an era which reached a zenith with its iconic *La Maquina* ("the machine") forward line of Juan Carlos Munoz, Jose Manuel Moreno, Adolfo Pedernera, Angel Labruna and Felix Loustau. Di Stefano was a talented young centre-forward, but to find a game in the top division he had to play for River at outside-right or on loan at Huracan. Only when Pedernera left for Colombia did a vacancy at centre-forward arise.

He played in, starred for and conquered the national team, too. But football for Di Stefano was always about professionalism. He only wanted to be a winner and was always prepared to up sticks and follow a pragmatic course in pursuit of victory on the pitch and financial security off it.

In the late 1940s Argentina's club owners sought as much revenue as possible while paying their players as

little as possible. Just as the players went on strike, Colombia's renegade clubs launched their own professional league.

Pedernera flew back to Buenos Aires and rounded up a host of talented players, with Di Stefano at their head, to move to Bogota and join him at Millonarios. The grounds were packed, the money was good and the football outstanding. Being outside FIFA, Millonarios and others paid no transfer fees, investing solely in the team.

Di Stefano seized the moment. He found he could roam the pitch, barking orders, directing play with both feet and mind, and still find space to score a flood of goals.

He mesmerised Santiago Bernabeu when Millonarios played in Real Madrid's 50th anniversary tournament in the summer of 1952. Colombia had rejoined FIFA and now the "stolen" players would have to return to their old clubs – but, in the meantime, Millonarios generated as much cash as they could from friendlies.

Bernabeu had built a vast new stadium for Real Madrid. Now he needed to build a team to justify it and fill it. Of all the fine players he bought, none was the equal of Di Stefano, arguably the greatest of all time.

There was, however, a transfer wrangle with Barcelona. Madrid agreed a deal with Millonarios, Barcelona agreed a deal with River Plate. Bernabeu, angry the Catalans had snatched Ladislav Kubala from Real three years earlier, pulled strings.

Di Stefano, increasingly impatient and inactive in a hotel in Barcelona, was just packing to return to Argentina when it was ruled that he should play alternate seasons with the two clubs, starting with Madrid.

Far from fit, his first games were unimpressive. Barcelona sold Madrid their half-share – and were made to suffer immediately when Di Stefano struck his first Spanish hat-trick against them.

For the next 11 years, as Madrid ruled first Spain, then Europe, then the world, Di Stefano was inspiration, commander, creator and leading goalscorer. Then, as now, their greatest rivals were Barcelona, with such stars as Kubala, Luis Suarez, Evaristo, Sandor Kocsis, Zoltan Czibor, Joan Segarra and Antoni Ramallets.

But for Di Stefano, the most outstanding individual of them all, the needs of the team were always paramount. Years later, looking back to the Madrid-Barcelona rivalry of those days, he told me: "They had the better individuals but we had something more important – we were the better team."

FACT FILE

HONOURS
Argentina
Copa America 1947
River Plate
Primera Division 1945, 1947
Millonarios
Colombian league 1949, 1951, 1952; Colombian Cup 1953
Real Madrid
Intercontinental Cup 1960; European Cup 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960; La Liga 1954, 1955, 1957, 1958, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964; Spanish Cup 1962

Not that he was oblivious to the aura created around other great players. In the summer of 1959 Madrid bought Didi, the creative fulcrum of Brazil's 1958 World Cup-winners. When Didi was presented to local media and fans, Di Stefano was persuaded to be pictured shaking hands. Smiling, he told Didi: "They say you've come to replace me. Well, you're too old and you're not good enough." Didi lasted just six months before being loaned to Valencia then sold to Botafogo.

Ferenc Puskas was a totally different case. The "Galloping Major" arrived in 1958, badly unfit from two inactive years after fleeing the Hungarian Revolution. But Puskas was interested in scoring goals, not creating them. He was no rival to Di Stefano but an ally, never more than on that iconic day in 1960 when Madrid thrashed Eintracht Frankfurt 7-3 in Glasgow to win the European Cup for a fifth successive time. Puskas scored four goals, Di Stefano three.

From that peak Di Stefano and his club slid gradually from grace. He played two years for Kubala at Espanyol then coached Valencia, Boca Juniors and Madrid among others. It was he who gave a debut to a precocious home-grown kid called Raul.

When Florentino Perez bought control, launching the Galacticos era, he brought Di Stefano back as honorary president. It was no less than "*El Viejo*" deserved.

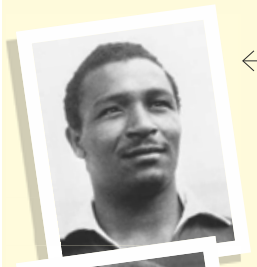
He remained a critical observer, but never expressed a preference for the football of his day. The nearest he came, perhaps, was when I asked him about the number of games confronting players today. He replied: "I never got tired of playing. Also, we played all 90 minutes of all our games..."

No player ever committed himself to every minute of every game quite like Alfredo Di Stefano.

Keir Radnedge

Tribute...the Bernabeu pays homage to Di Stefano before the Spanish Super Cup first leg against Atletico Madrid in August

OTHERS WHO PASSED AWAY IN 2014



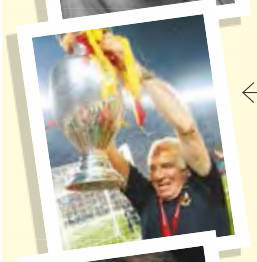
MARIO COLUNA
1935-2014
Midfielder who captained Benfica to two European Cups and Portugal to third place at the 1966 World Cup.

EUSEBIO
1942-2014
The first great African footballer who achieved global success with Benfica and Portugal.

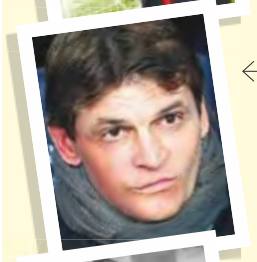
TOM FINNEY
1921-2014
One of England's greatest centre-forwards, famed for his loyalty to Preston North End.

RICHARD MOLLER NIELSEN
1937-2014
Led Denmark to against-the-odds victory at the 1992 European Championship.

BELLINI
1930-2014
Captain of Brazil's 1958 World Cup-winning side.



LUIS ARAGONES
1938-2014
Ex-Atletico Madrid and Barcelona coach who guided Spain to the Euro 2008 title.



TITO VILANOVA
1968-2014
Former assistant to Pep Guardiola, he won La Liga in 2012 in his first season in charge. Stepped down in 2013 due to ill health and died a year later.

GYULA GROSICS
1926-2014
Goalkeeper in Hungary's golden team of the 1950s.

"You can't really prepare on the training ground for dashes off your line"

Facetoface

MANUEL NEUER

"I don't like red carpets. I prefer green grass"

The Germany and Bayern Munich star has reinvented the role of the modern-day goalkeeper

Cristiano Ronaldo, one of your rivals for the World Player of the Year award, stands for glamour. Is this an essential factor in winning individual prizes?
I don't see it that way. I'm a sportsman and not the ambassador for a brand. I'm not the sort to pose in my underwear.

Does a football star also have to be in show business?
I don't like red carpets. I prefer green grass. I'm happier on the training ground, where I'm always trying to improve my game. I like putting on a show on the pitch but only when it's appropriate.

Is it an advantage in an international poll that you are a keeper?
Not really. After matches, TV coverage concentrates on the goals, the near misses, the assists and the best tricks. Unfortunately, viewers often don't get to see me taking big risks by racing off my line or distributing the ball well.

But you certainly made people sit up with your first-time back-heeled pass against Eintracht Frankfurt this season...
I really didn't know what to do with that pass back. The ball came to me at hip height.

Germany coach Joachim Low says you have brought about a major change in world football with your "sweeper-keeper" style of play at the World Cup. Do you agree?
What I try to do is make the best possible job of calculating the risks. In the past people would say, "Why has he come off his line again?" Now it's a case of "Why didn't he come out ?" Yes, something has changed.

Is there a danger of you losing the balance between a traditional goalkeeping style and an outfield player role?
Not at all. I try to stay relaxed and analytical about it. For me, it's a serious, legitimate way to play. I know there can be bad consequences in these sort of situations. My game does involve a lot of risk, but the important thing is to keep cool. You can't really prepare on the training ground for dashes off your line. It needs anticipation and you must be able to read the game. When I'm working with good defenders and they know that I'm alive and alert, everyone can feel secure.

How do you see your goalkeeping style developing in the future?
The aim is to stay at the top level, to improve the small details and not go around in circles. I will not alter my daily training regime.

At what age does a goalkeeper reach his prime?
I feel great right now [Neuer is 28]. I don't know what it will be like when I'm 30. It all depends on fitness. If I'm training well, I know I'll be fine on a match day.

Why have Germany conceded eight goals in four games since the World Cup?
We've a new back four and the team has to get used to these players. We have to find our way again after the World Cup. Some key figures have retired and we've also had injuries to Sami Khedira, Bastian Schweinsteiger and Mesut Ozil.

Was it a case of carelessness?
We simply made mistakes. Against Ireland we allowed them two or three goal chances, yet otherwise defended well. Above all, it was the same problem we had in the 4-4 draw with Sweden [in a World Cup 2014 qualifier]. In the hectic key moments we didn't play our football. We were too narrow and didn't move the ball around well enough. We went into our shell a little and began passing the ball back. I was having to hit long balls upfield. We didn't stick to our usual way of playing.

Jerome Boateng has been the only constant in the German back four of late. That must make things difficult...
We're lucky to have him. He's one of the best centre-backs in the world. It's good he has stayed fit and has been present for every game.

Germany's general manager, Oliver Bierhoff, has warned that you must now play like world champions in every game...
That's obvious. At Schalke, we always wanted to put one over Bayern. You're always motivated to beat the best. Everyone wanted to beat Barcelona and it's the same with Bayern As world champions we are there to be shot at. It's up to us to prove we were worthy winners.

What has to improve in the national team in 2015?
We're in transition. The new players have to establish themselves and we still have to fully deal with the after-effects of the World Cup. Those of us who took part in the tournament went to our absolute limit. Next spring we can go again. We aim to win Euro 2016, to achieve what the Spanish did. A World Cup-European Championship double is the goal.

Do you see Germany's place at Euro 2016 as a certainty?
Giving up some points this autumn makes qualification difficult but I'm convinced we'll make it. We're not worried at all.

How has your world title changed you as a player and a man?
I'm the same footballer, but on a personal level I'm much more in the public eye.

Interview by Karlheinz Wild/ESM

Facetoface

HERVE RENARD

"Qualification was difficult, but the most important thing was to be on the starting line with the other 15 teams for the Nations Cup"

The 46-year-old, who won the tournament with Zambia in 2012, takes a strong Ivory Coast to the 2015 African Nations Cup

You took over as coach of Ivory Coast in July 2014. It's one of the glamorous posts in African football but it can't be an easy job...

It's not an easy job but I was surprised by the atmosphere with the players. Sometimes you think they are completely different because they are big stars but it was OK. We had a difficult qualifying campaign for the African Nations Cup, but now in Africa it's difficult everywhere. They were doing well in terms of spirit and at least in the end we got the qualification, which was the most important.

Why was the qualifying campaign so patchy? Is there still a hangover from the disappointing exit at the World Cup?

Yes, I think so. The games in September were very, very difficult. First of all, most of the players were not playing at their clubs because they came late [after the World Cup] and because many play at big clubs where the squads are bigger so it is difficult for them to get regular game time. Plus, Didier Drogba stopped; [Didier] Zokora stopped; Kolo Toure did not play a single minute with Liverpool; Serey Die the same; [Cheikh] Tiote was not playing with Newcastle; [Arthur] Boka not playing with Malaga; [Serge] Aurier having only a few games with Paris Saint-Germain; Copa [goalkeeper Boubacar Barry] not playing for Lokeren. Wow! The games in September [a narrow home win over Sierra Leone and then a 4-1 loss to Cameroon] were very difficult, especially in Cameroon. But we just said we had to stay focused and make sure we secure this qualification. Qualification was difficult but the most important thing was to be on the starting line with the other 15 teams for the Nations Cup.

What is the secret to winning the African Nations Cup?

I think it's the build-up. There was a lot of comment at the time about Zambia only getting among the top teams because of luck, but I always remind people that we started in 2008. One year later we finished third at CHAN [the African Nations Championship, a tournament for national teams made up of home-based players only]. People might not be all that interested in CHAN but it was the first step. In 2010 we reached the quarter-finals at the Nations Cup in Angola. We only lost to Nigeria on penalties after a 0-0 draw and I think we were better than Nigeria on the day, who were down to 10 men. We had some chances but didn't score, but we were almost in the semi-finals. [Nigeria goalkeeper Vincent] Enyeama was fantastic; he stopped two penalties in the shoot-out. So when we went to the 2012 finals, in our minds, we believed we had a chance. We were the first country to arrive in Equatorial Guinea and we were determined we were going to go to the other co-hosts Gabon to play in the Final. Of course, we also had the motivation of the memory of what had happened there in 1993, when the Zambian airplane crashed in Libreville and the whole team was killed. We felt we had missed out on something big in 2010 when we became the first Zambian side to reach the quarter-finals in 14 years. That was a good result at the time, but for us – the coaching staff and the players – it was not enough because we thought we deserved better in 2010. The spirit was the same but with a big determination to do better. We believed in ourselves when we went over there; we went with a fantastic team spirit.

The Ivorians obviously want you to do for them what you did for Zambia and win the African Nations Cup, but you've only been in the job for less than six months. There must be a heavy burden of expectation on you...

Yes, of course you need time to achieve anything. But in the space of a month you do have an opportunity to try and work on getting the right combination of fantastic team spirit, skill and everything...and you can do something. Like Stephen Keshi did with Nigeria. He first found some players in the local league and in a few months he was able to put together a very strong team and they won the 2013 African [Nations] Cup. He did a fantastic job, so maybe we can do the same but there are a lot of teams who want to win the cup, of course.

Speaking of that, who do you think will do well?

In our qualifying group, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo were very tough. Cameroon have made a very good transition after the World Cup. Beware of them. I was impressed by the matches that South Africa played in the qualifiers. I didn't think many others would take them too seriously but they are ready, they are working, they are fast, they are young. I think it's a very good combination. Algeria had a very good World Cup and even after changing the coach, it seems they are on the same track. Of course, there are also a lot of very good teams and it is very difficult to say before the competition. What I know, is it will be a very tough tournament.

What do you think of the decision to move the tournament from Morocco to Equatorial Guinea?

Morocco was going to be one of the best Nations Cup tournaments ever because they have everything. Wonderful stadiums and facilities, great hotels. We played in Equatorial Guinea in 2012 and there were hardly any people in the stadium. If they want this next tournament to be successful they must ensure they have better support.

Interview by Mark Gleeson

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

JOEL

CLUB	Coritiba (Bra, on loan from Londrina, Bra)
COUNTRY	Cameroon
POSITION	Forward
AGE	21 (06.12.93)
PREVIOUS CLUB	Iraty (Bra)
HONOURS	2014 Parana state championship

Joel became a global internet sensation in mid-September when, in one of his first games for Coritiba, he celebrated a game-clinching goal against Sao Paulo by leaping over the advertising boards – and falling straight down a hole on the other side.

The reality, however, is that he dug Coritiba out of a hole, and in the process became one of the surprise stories of the 2014 Brazilian championship. In the farewell season of playmaker Alex, the Brazilian who left such a mark on Turkish football with Fenerbahce, Coritiba seemed relegation certainties. They spent much of the campaign in the relegation zone and found goals very hard to come by. By mid-October, with 10 games to go, they were bottom of the table.

The fact that safety was achieved with relative comfort has a lot to do with the arrival of a rangy, left-footed centre-forward from Cameroon.

Few African players have made much of an impact in Brazil, but Diederrick Joel Tagueu Tadjo has been based in the southern state of Parana since 2009, first with Iraty and then Londrina. His big breakthrough at senior level came in the first half of 2014, when he helped carry Londrina to their first Parana state title for over 20 years, and continued to show impressive form at national level in the fourth division.

There was interest from Germany – where, to get a work permit, he would need top-flight experience. The previous year Londrina had been in a similar situation with left-back Wendell, who moved to Gremio for a few months before joining Bayer Leverkusen. Londrina, then, were looking for a side to take Joel on loan.

Coritiba were desperate and, though they do not stand to make any money from his sale, they can congratulate themselves on a good piece of business. The five late-season goals, leadership of the attacking line and all-round contribution of the African were a significant factor in the club's Brasileirao survival.

They would surely like to keep him for a while longer, but that seems unlikely as 50 per cent of his economic rights have already been sold to a German investment group. It could be in their interest to park him with a bigger Brazilian club for the first six months of 2015 – and after his exploits in the last few months, there should be no shortage of potential takers for the striker dubbed "Joel the cruel" by Coritiba fans.

Part of the Cameroon squad that qualified for the 2011 Under-20 World Cup, he did not make the trip to Colombia for the finals. Instead, he has thrown himself into a South American adventure of his own.

Tim Vickery

Nabil FEKIR

CLUB	Lyon
COUNTRY	France
POSITION	Attacking midfielder
AGE	21 (18.07.93)

Equally impressive as a playmaker, out wide or as a second striker, Nabil Fekir spent the first half of this season making the extraordinary commonplace and drawing comparisons with Hatem Ben Arfa.

Both are left-footers of African stock who made their breakthrough with Lyon – although Fekir was almost lost to the game at 14 when he was cut from the club's academy. But instead of drifting out of the game, he battled on, performing so well for local amateur club Saint-Priest that within three years he was back in the fold.

"I'm proud of the path I've followed," says the France under-21 who is being courted by Algeria, the land of his parents. "Playing for OL, leaving, then returning has helped me a lot, especially character-wise.

"Highs and lows are part of a footballer's life. You can't only have great moments."

Although he has benefitted from a favourable set of circumstances – not least the injury problems of Clement Grenier and Yoann Gourcuff, and the sale last summer of Bafetimbi Gomis – he has still had to earn the faith of coach Hubert.

Technically slick, he can destabilise defences with his dribbling and his crosses, deliver from set-pieces, work intricate one-twos, play in runners with his back to goal and score goals.

"I like him a lot," says Bernard Lacombe, the former France striker who works as a special adviser to Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas. "I don't think there's anyone like him in French football.

"Passers don't tend to have his feints and tricks. He has that special, unpredictable knack which is unique to left-footers"

Nick Bidwell

Virgil VAN DIJK

CLUB	Celtic (Sco)
COUNTRY	Holland
POSITION	Centre-back
AGE	23 (08.07.91)
PREVIOUS CLUB	Groningen
HONOURS	Scottish Premiership 2014

All those coaches, scouts and technical directors currently bemoaning a lack of top-quality centre-backs should take a trip to the East End of Glasgow and check out the elegance of the Holland under-21 international.

Bought from Eredivisie side Groningen for £2.6million in 2013, Virgil Van Dijk may not be operating in one of Europe's big leagues, but he is an outstanding prospect nonetheless, displaying a wonderful mix of physical and aerial power, sound anticipation and two-footed proficiency.

Tall, strong, quick and athletic, he has all the requisite attributes, but what really sets him apart is the grace and style with which he brings the ball out from the back.

While his ball control and passing are of the highest order, and he hits a great free-kick from distance, it is his adventure that is the most exciting part of the package. Last season against St Johnstone, he waltzed through from the half-way line to score a breathtaking solo goal for Celtic. And that goalscoring ability has been on show ever since his first start for Groningen: a Europa League play-off against Den Haag in May 2011, in which he was moved up front at half-time and found the net twice as his side fought back from an opening-leg defeat to level the aggregate score.

Jumping up and down with excitement in a VIP box that afternoon was Groningen old boy Arjen Robben and it remains odd that the pair have yet to link up in the national team. Despite Van Dijk's excellent form last term, Louis Van Gaal, could not find a place for the Breda-born defender in the World Cup squad. And although Van Gaal's successor, Guus Hiddink, has called him up this season, he has kept him on the bench up until now.

Nick Bidwell

> "Once Virgil gets his chance with the national team, I'm sure he'll grab it. He's a special talent"
>
> **Pieter Huistra, Van Dijk's first pro coach at Groningen**

Another case for the defence

Jonathan Wilson considers some of the reasons why more goals are being scored in the English top flight

Exciting...QPR (hoops) beat Leicester City 3-2 in the Premier League in the run-up to Christmas

There has been much talk this season about defending getting worse. Gary Neville wrote a typically thoughtful piece in *The Daily Telegraph*, noting how the average number of goals per game in the Premier League has risen since 2009 and suggesting that the focus of the game has changed.

Neville noted: "With old school coaches, 60–70 per cent of your training-ground work would be defensive. Where your foot would be, the position of your hips, how often you would have to turn your head to avoid ball watching.

"I compare it to a musician stripping a song back to its elements. I started off with a high defensive base. Players now are starting out with a high technical grounding and learn the defending later."

He also made the point that rotation means back fours get less opportunity to work together as a unit. For example, in 1995–96, when the Premier League switched to 20 teams, 79 defenders played more than 30 games; last season the figure was 44.

> "With old-school coaches, 60-70 per cent of your training-ground work would be defensive"
>
> **Ex-England and Manchester United full-back Gary Neville**

Changes in the laws have made it harder for defences to intimidate opponents and to play an offside trap. All of that makes sense. And yet goals per game in the Premier League have dropped this season to 2.61 from 2.76 last season. The season before it was 2.79, and before that 2.80, 2.79, 2.77. The season before that, in 2008–09, there were 2.47 goals per game then, going back, 2.63, 2.45, 2.48, 2.56, 2.66, 2.63, 2.63, 2.61, 2.78...

So, it's probably fair to say that over the past five seasons there has been an increase in the number of goals scored of roughly 0.15 goals per game on the decade before that.

It doesn't necessarily follow that an increase in the number of goals per game means defending is getting worse – it may be that attacking is getting better – but there does appear to be a minor trend.

Looking back over the figures for the last century, two things are striking. One is that that figure of goals has remained remarkably constant. This is the 116th top-flight season in English football; and of those, 50 have seen between 2.5 and 2.8

Cautious...Liverpool (in red) beat Leeds in the 1965 FA Cup Final

goals per game scored.

The other is what happened in the early 1970s. The four seasons between 1970-71 and 1973-74 are all in the lowest-scoring 10 seasons ever – with an all-time low of 2.36 goals per game in 1970-71. In 1969-70 there were 2.62, and, working backwards, 2.63, 3.03, 3.00, 3.15, 3.34, 3.40, 3.32, 3.42, 3.73, 3.50, 3.66, 3.73.

There was, in other words, a sudden and startling drop in goals per game between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s, the sort of shift in goals per game that had one been seen once before – in 1925-26 when the change in the offside law led to a sudden spurt in goals per game. What's intriguing is that there is no such obvious trigger in the late 1960s, but the shift seems the result of tactical evolution.

Two events in the 1950s led England to re-evaluate its tactical approach. The first was the 6-3 defeat to Hungary in 1953 that led to the essential realisation that the old preconceptions could no longer be considered sacrosanct, and the second was the 1958 World Cup, won by a Brazil side using a 4-2-4. Crucially that happened in Sweden, which was close enough to enable a number of British observers to go and watch, and it confirmed that the use of a back four – Hungary had used a back three with a very deep-lying midfielder, so were on the way to that system – offered both flexibility and defensive solidity.

Over the 10 years that followed, the lessons of those two events spread through the English game. Wingers were phased out, teams began defending zonally, the back four became a common sight. Alf Ramsey had been able to befuddle opponents with his Ipswich Town title-winners of 1962 by having one winger play deep; by the end of the decade it was common that both wingers played as midfielders – and defences, freed from the constraints of a man-to-man system – knew how to deal with that.

But the revolution of the 1960s wasn't just to do with shape; it was also to do with style. As the practice of feeding wingers to beat their full-back and get crosses into the box faded away, so teams began protecting possession rather more, playing what became known as "method football". The two prime proponents of that way of playing were Don Revie at Leeds United and Bill Shankly at Liverpool: when their sides met in the 1965 FA Cup Final, Liverpool winning 2-1, the result was a cautious game that looks, for want of a better term, very "modern".

The reaction, in some quarters, was one of outrage. *The Times* spoke wearily of "the quiet prelude" of the "lateral method play", while *Daily Mirror* columnist Peter Wilson

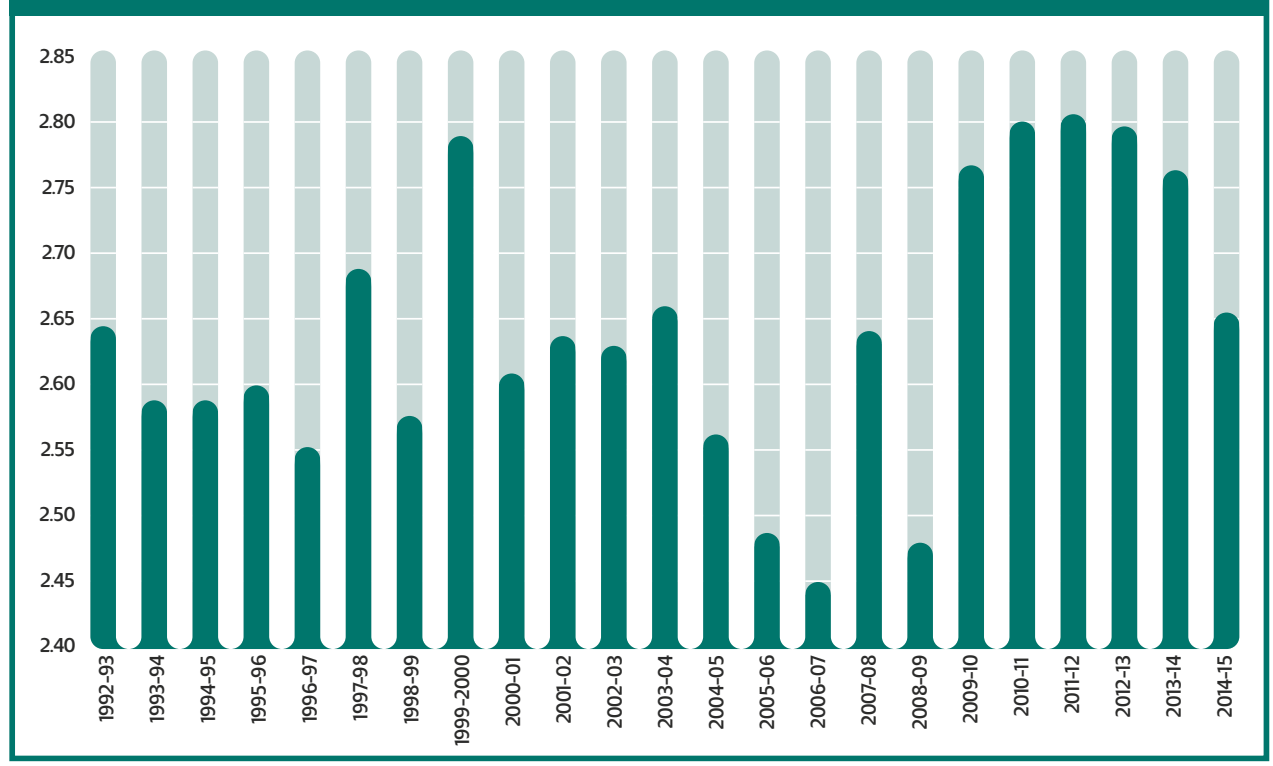
Thoughtful...Neville

was despairing of the way football headed. "I am told," he wrote, "that if we are to survive the rigours of the World Cup, we must forget individualism, the brilliant flashes of inspiration which transform a treadmill into a flying machine, the genius which transmutes a muddied oaf into a booted genius."

But Wilson was fighting a losing battle. What Leeds and Liverpool had started, England's victory in the World Cup the following year confirmed. Football became less about individuality and more about the team unit, discipline and organisation. Goals per game dropped from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s by around about three-quarters of a goal per game to settle on a norm that has endured ever since. It's possible that the last five years have seen an upward turn that will continue, or it may simply be a blip.

Neville's concerns about defending feel right, his arguments seem logical, but if the changes he has identified are having an impact on the numbers of goals scored per game, they are nothing like as profound as those chances of half a century ago. **WS**

PREMIER LEAGUE: AVERAGE GOALS SCORED PER GAME



Keir Radnedge

THE INSIDER

The expert view on events off the pitch

Garcia mess needs indie solution

FIFA's ethics fiasco raises the need for a truly independent global watchdog

Rescue act...FIFA's audit and compliance chairman Scala

The resignation of Michael Garcia, and the failure of the "independent ethics chambers" over the World Cup bid scandal, raises the question of whether international sport needs a system which is truly stand alone.

Mark Pieth, the Basle governance expert who led the FIFA reform process, saw his sparkly new twin-chamber set-up as the greatest achievement of a project which became increasingly bogged down. This was the first major undertaking of his independent governance committee and was carried through almost before recalcitrant sports politicians and federations realised what had happened.

But even then Pieth's plans began to go awry. While he was happy with Hans-Joachim Eckert as ethics judge, Michael Garcia was far from his original choice as investigator-cum-prosecutor. Indeed, Garcia was not even on a shortlist headed by International Criminal Court prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo, followed by Scotland Yard's Sue Akers. Ronald Noble, former secretary-general of Interpol (which receives €20million over 10 years from FIFA towards its new base in Singapore), has been credited with coming up with the name of Garcia.

The clash of conservative Bavarian judge and aggressive American attorney has not made for unity of methodology or purpose. This is part of the reason the game has ended up with the half-baked pudding of speculation, interim report, broken confidences and the need for a rescue act by Domenico Scala, the audit and compliance chairman.

> We simply have to have Garcia's text. We don't have the underlying material and that is the problem. We can't really judge if Eckert is correct or not"
>
> **Mark Pieth on the ethics report**

The Swiss-Italian businessman, perhaps the only impressive figure involved in the farrago, has been staggered by the evidence of subterfuge and avarice piling up on his desk.

The bid scandal inquiry's credibility has been hedged with doubts over whether Garcia saw much of the material garnered by *The Sunday Times* and by claims that Eckert met FIFA president Sepp Blatter before drawing up the interim report which cleared Russia and Qatar of any serious wrongdoing.

Garcia's lodging of an ethics objection against Eckert for his "erroneous" summary was the last straw, tipping the balance against any shred of credibility.

FIFA is not alone in the contradictory trap of an independent inquiry which can never be viewed as such.

Cycling's international federation has been assailed by a new doping row over the Astana team despite all the new-broom-sweeps-clean promises of the UCI's British president Brian Cookson. One of the factors in Cookson's ousting of Pat McQuaid was the collapse of an inquiry into the Lance Armstrong scandal.

Athletics is also staring into the credibility abyss after a German television documentary from *ARD* generated hugely damaging accusations of systematic doping against the sport's Russian federation, as well as doubts over historically ignored positive tests.

Russia's athletics chief Valentin Balakhnichev also happens to be treasurer of the international federation, the IAAF – just as sports minister Vitaly "we lost all our documents" Mutko is a member of FIFA's executive committee. Balakhnichev has stepped down pending an "independent" inquiry.

Standing for the IAAF presidency in 2015 is Britain's Seb Coe who was briefly an ineffectual ethics chairman within FIFA then a board member of England's 2018 World Cup bid.

Even the International Olympic Committee owns a compromised ethics system. Its own committee can investigate only issues passed on by the IOC executive. It has no independent investigatory powers.

So, whither independence? For some years, more and more senior figures in sports politics and sports law have pondered an independent integrity body which could lead the attack on match manipulation. Ethics policing could be another string to its bow.

Anyone objecting that this would remove investigatory powers would surely risk self-incrimination. **WS**

Saturdays are safe – but for how long?

English football is set for a new round of domestic television negotiation. The current deal is worth £3.018billion and the clubs, always on the lookout to justify a new hike in fees, are ready to consider anything and everything.

The so-called "39th match" has been kicked off the agenda and permission for live match transmission on a Saturday afternoon has been ruled out – for now.

UEFA has always insisted that particular window is sacrosanct at national level for the sake of attendances and involvement in grass-roots football. This has seen all the important games switched to various other time slots.

But it has also been a source of dispute that Saturday afternoon games from one country can be shown live in another – as the Scandinavian TV channels were quickest to realise with live coverage of English matches during their winter breaks. This then led to English pubs pirating foreign-coverage signals.

Television is pushing back the boundaries all the time because the big clubs want to cash in while this amazing, economy-defying pot of gold survives.

How much longer before money dictates Saturday afternoon football is also up for grabs?

Ground for hope... the Central Stadium in Almaty, Kazakhstan

Spread the World Cup largesse around

Kazakhstan wants to host the World Cup. Retiring federation president Adilbek Zhaksybekov has said the country wants it in 2026 – though, under present FIFA rules, that is impossible as Kazakhstan is a UEFA member and one region can host the finals only once in any three-tournament span.

Hence the first available opportunity is 2030, the year of the centenary World Cup.

For some years Uruguay and Argentina plotted a joint bid. Uruguay was the original host and beat southern neighbour Argentina in the inaugural Final. It seemed the ideal solution – but then Argentina, its economy in all kinds of chaos, withdrew.

The Chilean federation stepped in and Harold Mayne-Nicholls, its former president, pondered whether FIFA should follow the UEFA 2020 model and stage a pan-South-American World Cup.

Sounds beyond complicated but then sport ignores its own tradition at its peril.

Consider the Olympics. The centenary Games in 1996 should have been in Athens. Instead the IOC took the dollar and went to Atlanta instead, with pretty grim and unloved consequences.

Maybe the current organisational model of the World Cup is no longer viable. The gigantism which prompted so much corruption behind the Brazilian host city scenes is ugly. Why not take each group stage to a different country? If FIFA wants a huge, overblown World Cup it should be prepared to accept a stage which spreads the finals around a region.

That would spread the development largesse and reduce the monopolistic opportunities which helped Ricardo Teixeira build up his family fortune.

Otherwise, maybe it's Kazakhstan here we come...

Switched on...live domestic transmission of Saturday afternoon Premier League games could prove another cash cow for the big clubs

Facetoface

MILES JACOBSON

"We want people to be using their imagination to create their back story and play it out in their heads"

Miles Jacobson, the man behind Football Manager, talks about the latest version of the award-winning game

What's the most fanatical story you've heard about from players of Football Manager?
The most ridiculous stories I've heard are the things that people do; you know, the suits for the Cup Final! I think that's pretty nice. I can't say that I've ever done it [Miles looks up and mouths "I have!"]. The press conferences in the mirror is a weird one for me. Yes, I do the press conferences in my head, but looking in a mirror? When you're doing a press conference you're not looking at yourself anyway! Then there was a story from a guy called Tim Pike who got so into the club he was managing that he had his honeymoon there. It was his first-ever trip abroad and he went to see a second division team in Bulgaria playing! We also get a lot of stories of people having a second club off the back of pressing the random-choice button, so there's always lots of nice stories. It's one of the only games where you're creating your own story. There is no linear story. We want people to be using their imagination to create their back story and play it out in their heads.

What about ideas from fans. How many have made the game?
There are thousands of ideas that come from fans of the game that have made it into the game; I reckon over 50 per cent of the features each year. When we're making the game and deciding what's going to go in to the game for the next year, we actually sit down as a team, from 11am until 6pm, every day, for a month. Everyone is invited to every meeting in the studio, whether they are from the testing side, from the business side or from the programming side. We go through every single idea that has come in that last year – whether it be from someone in the studio, someone in football or someone on one of our forums. We have one thread on our forums that we push everyone to, so if someone asks something on Facebook we ask them to post it in this thread. We anonymise all of them so no one knows where any of the ideas have come from, so if something comes from our forums it's treated in exactly the same way as something that's come from an international football manager, or something that's come from me. We then vote on everything, which works out the priority of the feature. It then comes back to me as the director of the game and I then put the jigsaw puzzle together on what should be going in; to try to make sure there's something for every type of person that

On the ball...Jacobson

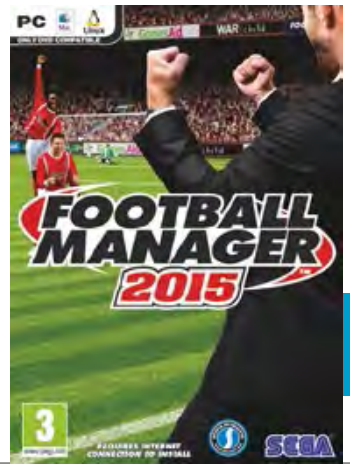
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2015

> "Thousands of ideas come from fans have made it into the game; I reckon over 50 per cent of the features each year"

plays the game. The community is so important, so if anyone has ideas of things that they want to put in the game go to community.sigames.com and there is a thread called "the wish-list thread". Please come and post your ideas as everything does get debated. However stupid you might think it is, it will still get debated!

The 'Tracksuit Manager' or 'The Suit Manager' – which one is your favourite? And any tips or hints?
It's really difficult when someone asks me what my favourite is as it is like asking "Who's your favourite nephew?" I love them both equally! If you go down the route of being a more motivational style of manager the players are going to react better to you, and the player power element of the game is part of the jigsaw puzzle. You couldn't do the one element without doing the other element in the same year. So with player power in there, the motivational skills are very important because players do get upset when they're not playing, as they do in real life. If you're a lower-league manager and you can't afford to take on any coaches, you need to be going down the coaching route and have your coaching badges to be able to give the players that extra boost. Making that choice at the start is an interesting one, but it's also for people that don't play 20-season games and prefer the five-season games; it adds an extra element for them as they can choose a different character every time they're starting a new game. I'm very proud of the new interfaces and animations as well, there's a lot of stuff in there this year that, as someone that plays the game, I am delighted it's there.

See video clips of this interview at worldsoccer.com



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EQUIPMENT

World Service

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Rerun...Bahrain's Abdulwahab Al Malood (right) and Ahmed El Sayed of Qatar met in the Gulf Cup of Nations and will clash again in the Asian Cup finals

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Together...Ivory Coast's Serge Aurier (left) and Henri Bedimo are in the same African Nations Cup group

Gold...Mexico's Carlos Salcedo

MEXICO
Hosts claim gold medal
Two goals from Erick Torres, plus one each from Angel Zaldivar and Raul Lopez, gave hosts Mexico gold in the Central American & Caribbean Games. They beat Venezuela 4-1 in the Final to win the men's football tournament for a sixth time, although it was the first success since the Games were last held in Mexico, 24 years ago.

RUSSIA
Confederations venues
Confederations Cup 2017 games, which will be used as test events for the World Cup, will be staged in Moscow, St Petersburg, Sochi and Kazan.

SOUTH AFRICA
Mandela victory
Ephraim Mashaba maintained his unbeaten record as national coach since his appointment in August with a 2-0 victory over Ivory Coast in the Nelson Mandela Challenge match at Mbombela Stadium in Nelspruit.

"I'm happy we maintained the momentum of recent months," Mashaba said of a game that involved no European-based players for either side.

"Fringe players were given a chance and some excelled."

Bongani Zungu, a midfielder with Mamelodi Sundowns, and Chippa United' striker David Zulu were on target for the hosts.

Internationals

GULF CUP

Played in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Group A
Nov 13
Saudi Arabia 1 (F Al Muwallad 37)
Qatar 1 (Ibrahim Majid 53)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Williams (Aus)

Nov 13
Yemen 0
Bahrain 0
Ref: Banihammad (UAE)

Nov 16
Yemen 0
Qatar 0
Ref: Abdul Baqi (Oma)

Nov 16
Saudi Arabia 3 (Al Shamrani 26, Al Hazaa og 54, Mohamed Husain og 70)
Bahrain 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sarray (Irq)

Nov 19
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al Abid 28)
Yemen 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Nov 19
Bahrain 0
Qatar 0
Ref: Shaban (Kuw)

GULF CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Qatar (Q)	3	0	3	0	1	1	3
Yemen	3	0	2	1	0	1	2
Bahrain	3	0	2	1	0	3	2

Group B
Nov 14
United Arab Emirates 0
Oman 0
Ref: Al Awaji (Sau)

Nov 14
Iraq 0
Kuwait 1 (F Al Enezi 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Nov 17
United Arab Emirates 2 (Mabkhout 18, 35)
Kuwait 2 (Naser 37, Al Mutawa 39)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Abdulhusin (Bhn)

Nov 17
Iraq 1 (Kasim 14)
Oman 1 (Ahmed Mubarak pen 51)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Balideh (Qat)

Nov 20
United Arab Emirates 2 (Mabkhout 50, 62)
Iraq 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Mirdasi (Sau)

Nov 20
Kuwait 0
Oman 5 (Al Muqbali 44, 90, Al Razaiqi 45+3, 48, 59)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Williams (Aus)

GULF CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Oman (Q)	3	1	2	0	6	1	5
UAE (Q)	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Kuwait	3	1	1	1	3	7	4
Iraq	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

● *Top 2 in both groups qualified for semi-finals*

Semi-finals
Nov 23
Oman 1 (Saleh 24)
Qatar 3 (Al Haidos pen 36, Assadalla 59, 67)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Borski (Pol)

Nov 23
Saudi Arabia 3 (Al Shamrani 19, Al Abid 22, Al Dawsari 86)
United Arab Emirates 2 (Khalil 53, 79)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Kovalenko (Uzb)

3rd-place match
Nov 25
Oman 0
United Arab Emirates 1 (Mabkhout 59)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Balideh (Qat)

Final
Nov 26
Qatar 2 (Mukhtar 18, Khoukhi 58)
Saudi Arabia 1 (Kariri 16)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Sarray (Irq)

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, November 30
Nov 30 - Nelspruit
South Africa 2 (Zungu 31, Zulu 53)
Ivory Coast 0
HT: 1-0

Saturday, December 13
Dec 13 - Chenzhou
China 4 (og 19, Wu Lei 35, Yang Xu 57, 79)
Kyrgyzstan 0
HT: 2-0
China: Yan Junling - Li Xuepeng (Zhang Chengdong 46), Zhang Linpeng (Mei Fang 46), Li Ang (Feng Xiaoting 46), Ji Xiang (Jiang Zhipeng 46), Zheng Zhi (Liao Lisheng 46), Zhao Xuri (Liu Jianye 46), Sun Ke (Yang Chaosheng 46), Wu Lei (Liu Binbin 46), Hao Junmin (Yu Hanchao 46), Gao Lin (Yang Xu 46).

Dec 13 - Dubai, UAE
Uzbekistan 1 (Rashidov 82)
Palestine 0
HT: 0-0

KEY TO TABLES
(Q) = qualified for next stage

2015 ASIAN CUP
In Australia

Match schedule
Group A
Jan 9 Australia v Kuwait (Melbourne)
Jan 10 South Korea v Oman (Canberra)
Jan 13 Kuwait v South Korea (Canberra)
Oman v Australia (Sydney)
Jan 17 Australia v South Korea (Brisbane)
Oman v Kuwait (Newcastle)

Group B
Jan 10 Uzbekistan v North Korea (Sydney)
Saudi Arabia v China (Brisbane)
Jan 14 North Korea v Saudi Arabia (Melbourne)
China v Uzbekistan (Brisbane)
Jan 18 Uzbekistan v Saudi Arabia (Melbourne)
China v North Korea (Canberra)

Group C
Jan 11 UAE v Qatar (Canberra)
Iran v Bahrain (Melbourne)
Jan 15 Bahrain v UAE (Canberra)
Qatar v Iran (Sydney)
Jan 19 Iran v UAE (Brisbane)
Qatar v Bahrain (Sydney)

Group D
Jan 12 Japan v Palestine (Newcastle)
Jordan v Iraq (Brisbane)
Jan 16 Palestine v Jordan (Melbourne)
Iraq v Japan (Brisbane)
Jan 20 Japan v Jordan (Melbourne)
Iraq v Palestine (Canberra)

● *Top 2 in each group qualify for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals
Jan 22 Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd (Melbourne) (QF1)
Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd (Brisbane) (QF2)
Jan 23 Gp C 1st v Gp D 2nd (Canberra) (QF3)
Gp D 1st v Gp C 2nd (Sydney) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Jan 26 QF1 winners v QF3 winners (Sydney)
Jan 27 QF2 winners v QF4 winners (Newcastle)

3rd-place match
Jan 30 (Newcastle)

Final
Jan 31 (Sydney)

2015 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP
In Equatorial Guinea

Match schedule
Group A
Jan 17 Equatorial Guinea v Congo (Bata)
Burkina Faso v Gabon (Bata)
Jan 21 Equatorial Guinea v Burkina Faso (Bata)
Gabon v Congo (Bata)
Jan 25 Congo v Burkina Faso (Ebebiyin)
Gabon v Equatorial Guinea (Bata)

Group B
Jan 18 Zambia v DR Congo (Ebebiyin)
Tunisia v Cape Verde (Ebebiyin)
Jan 22 Zambia v Tunisia (Ebebiyin)
Cape Verde v DR Congo (Ebebiyin)
Jan 26 DR Congo v Tunisia (Bata)
Cape Verde v Zambia (Ebebiyin)

Group C
Jan 19 Ghana v Senegal (Mongomo)
Algeria v South Africa (Mongomo)
Jan 23 Ghana v Algeria (Mongomo)
South Africa v Senegal (Mongomo)
Jan 27 South Africa v Ghana (Mongomo)
Senegal v Algeria (Malabo)

Group D
Jan 20 Ivory Coast v Guinea (Malabo)
Mali v Cameroon (Malabo)
Jan 24 Ivory Coast v Mali (Malabo)
Cameroon v Guinea (Malabo)
Jan 28 Cameroon v Ivory Coast (Malabo)
Guinea v Mali (Mongomo)

● *Top 2 in each group qualify for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals
Jan 31 Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd (Bata) (QF1)
Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd (Ebebiyin) (QF2)
Feb 1 Gp C 1st v Gp D 2nd (Mongomo) (QF3)
Gp D 1st v Gp C 2nd (Malabo) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Feb 4 QF1 winners v QF4 winners (Bata)
Feb 5 QF2 winners v QF3 winners (Malabo)

3rd-place match
Feb 7 (Malabo)

Final
Feb 8 (Bata)

2015 COPA AMERICA
In Chile

Match schedule
Group A
Jun 11 Chile v Ecuador (Santiago)
Jun 12 Mexico v Bolivia (Vina del Mar)
Jun 15 Ecuador v Bolivia (Valparaiso)
Chile v Mexico (Santiago)
Jun 19 Mexico v Ecuador (Rancagua)
Chile v Bolivia (Santiago)

Group B
Jun 13 Uruguay v Jamaica (Antofagasta)
Argentina v Paraguay (La Serena)
Jun 16 Paraguay v Jamaica (Antofagasta)
Argentina v Uruguay (La Serena)
Jun 20 Uruguay v Paraguay (La Serena)
Argentina v Jamaica (Vina del Mar)

Group C
Jun 14 Colombia v Venezuela (Rancagua)
Brazil v Peru (Temuco)
Jun 17 Brazil v Colombia (Santiago)
Jun 18 Peru v Venezuela (Valparaiso)
Jun 21 Colombia v Peru (Temuco)
Brazil v Venezuela (Santiago)

● *Top 2 in each group and the 2 3rd-placed teams with the best record qualify for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals
Jun 24 Gp A 1st v Best 3pl (Santiago) (QF1)
Jun 25 Gp A 2nd v Gp C 2nd (Temuco) (QF2)
Jun 26 Gp B 1st v 2nd-best 3pl (Vina del Mar) (QF3)
Jun 27 Gp C 1st v Gp B 2nd (Concepcion) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Jun 29 QF1 winners v QF2 winners (Santiago)
Jun 30 QF3 winners v QF4 winners (Concepcion)

3rd-place match
Jul 3 (Concepcion)

Final
Jul 4 (Santiago)

ASIAN CUP: FINALS

All set...the 16th Asian Cup finals are being staged in Australia, which is hosting the tournament for the first time

Continental showpiece remains wide open

The fact that the Asian Cup comes so soon after Brazil 2014 is a mixed blessing for the three favourites: Australia, South Korea and Japan. While it offers the trio an early opportunity to exorcise World Cup ghosts, all three – partly because of what happened in June – are in various stages of transition. As a result, the 16-team competition is a very hard one to call.

Unlike the last two Asian Cups, held in south-east Asia in 2007 and Qatar in 2011, the hosts are expected to be in the hunt for the trophy. Australia reached the Final four years ago and anything less will be disappointing, even if expectations are slipping along with confidence.

Coming into the job in October 2013, coach Ange Postecoglou has been granted time to rebuild an ageing Australia team, but one win in the last 10 has people worried – and that's nothing compared to how they will feel if Tim Cahill gets injured.

At least Australia's defensive issues are shared by a number of others – not least South Korea, who are their opponents in the final Group A game, which is the match of the first stage. Performances under new coach Uli Stielike have been largely encouraging, while striker Son Heung-min has been in fine form in Europe and could be the star of the Asian Cup. Kuwait and Oman may have their work cut out.

June was similarly chastening for Japan, who also have a new man at the helm. Javier Aguirre wanted to instill some "street smarts" into a naive team but there hasn't been too much evidence of that so far. Early experimental line-ups resulted in tame performances and mixed results, culminating in an insipid showing against a Neymar-inspired Brazil in October.

With pressure and concerns rising, the Mexican recalled the old guard for November wins against Honduras and Australia that had everyone feeling better. The latter victory contained the team's best 45 minutes of 2014. Keisuke Honda and Shinji Okazaki are playing well up front and will be expected to make up for a defence that looks suspect.

Iran still have Carlos Queiroz in charge. The World Cup went reasonably well, but while counter-attacking strategies may be accepted by the country's proud fans against Argentina, playing the same way against West Asian rivals Bahrain, UAE and Qatar in Group C is a harder sell. A lack of decent warm-up games will make it hard for Queiroz to change much, with a fortuitous November win over South Korea in Tehran being their first game since June, in contrast to the visitors' sixth.

Iran could do with being invited into West Asia's biennial tournament, the Gulf Cup, though political reasons make that highly unlikely. Seven of the eight teams in the November tournament are in Australia and Qatar won the competition, coming from behind to defeat hosts Saudi Arabia in the Final. Things are looking good for the 2022 World Cup hosts who, in 2014, also won the West Asian Football Federation Championships and Asia's under-19 title. Dark horses they remain, but they are getting lighter all the time.

As are the UAE, the team that is likely to be Qatar's rival for the other qualification spot in Group C, alongside Iran. A young team that has grown together need to make the step up from regional power to continental force. Much depends on playmaker Omar Abdulrahman, who has already turned down offers from the likes of Manchester City, and if he renews his partnership with in-form striker Ali Mabkhout then UAE could go far.

Bahrain and Iraq have recently fired coaches and performed poorly at the Gulf Cup. In December, Kuwait appointed Nabil Maaloul after losing 5-0 to an Oman team improving under Paul Le Guen, though it's hard to see either getting past Australia or South Korea to the knockout stage. In Group D, Iraq's woes mean that Jordan, now coached by Ray Wilkins, will fancy their chances of getting to the last eight along with Japan, though debutants Palestine are something of a wild card.

In Group B, North Korea, China, Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia are all capable of getting to the last four but will have to be at their best to do so.

And that is what it will come down to. There are a number of potential winners and it is all about who finds their form at the right time.

John Duerden

Warm-up...Qatar celebrate winning the 2014 Gulf Cup

Favourites...Japan (left) and Australia

> "I've got no doubt, come the Asian Cup, we'll be very, very competitive"
>
> **Australia coach Ange Postecoglou**

● For all the Asian Cup fixtures, see page 84

ASIAN CUP: FINALS
The Teams

GROUP A

Australia

The finalists in 2011 are hoping to go one better on home soil. Form is a serious worry, but home advantage will go a long way – especially with Tim Cahill still a serious threat.

Coach

Ange Postecoglou *(above)* was greeted as the new hope of Aussie football in 2013 but poor results have fans nervous. Still has no alternative to Cahill's goals or sorted out the backline.

Key Player

Mile Jedinak has been great for Crystal Palace but the all-action midfielder has sometimes struggled to replicate that form for the national team.

South Korea

Haven't ruled the continental roost since 1960 and are determined to end that drought while putting a dismal World Cup to bed. Still going through transition under a new coach but have the talent to win it.

Coach

Uli Stielike has vowed to produce winning football and seems to have found the old aggression, pace and intensity. Now to sort the defence.

Key Player

Son Heung-min *(above)* has been the best Asian player of 2014. Never quite replicated his explosive Bayer Leverkusen form for his country, but if he can, Korea will go far.

Oman

Yet to really make their mark outside West Asia but look well-organised and conceded just one goal in qualification. Goalscoring and self-belief could be the problem when facing Korea and Australia.

Coach

Appointed in 2011, Paul Le Guen has turned the team into a tight unit that has been taking on tough opposition in the build-up.

Key Player

Ali Al Habsi *(above)* is perhaps the best goalkeeper in Asia, and the former Bolton and Wigan shotstopper remains vital to a team that pins its hopes on not conceding.

Kuwait

Getting out of the group would be a major success for a team that plays tidy football but lacks the cutting edge to really hurt the bigger boys.

Coach

The former Tunisian midfielder Nabil Maaloul was appointed in December and does not have much time. Last seen coaching in Qatar, he has little experience outside West Asia.

Key Player

Bader Al Mutawa *(above)* is still only 29 but seems older thanks to seemingly being around forever. The attacking midfielder pulls the strings, and was linked to Malaga and Nottingham Forest a few years ago.

GROUP B

Saudi Arabia

The 2011 Asian Cup Final was only the second since 1980 not to feature the Saudis, who have some good young players coming through.

Coach

Al Ahli's Romanian boss Cosmin Olaroiu took a short break from his club job to replace Juan Lopez Caro, who was dismissed six weeks before the start of the tournament.

Key Player

Nasser Al Shamrani *(above)* scored 10 goals in the Asian Champions League but lost in the Final and was then caught spitting at an opponent. Named Asian Player of the Year hours before being banned for eight games.

China

Desperate for success with a sole World Cup appearance fading into history. Expectations are low but the Guangzhou Evergrande contingent adds stability.

Coach

French boss Alain Perrin *(above)* was an underwhelming appointment, especially as most wanted Marcello Lippi, but he has been coaxing some decent performances from a younger-looking team.

Key Player

Zheng Zhi provides a steadying influence and the 2013 Asian player of the year is a charismatic and intelligent leader in midfield.

Uzbekistan

Asia's nearly men made the quarter-finals in 2007 and the semis in 2011 but never quite managed to make the step to the next level. There is a feeling that, perhaps, the team is passing their peak and success in Australia would be quite a swansong.

Coach

Mirdjalal Kasimov *(above)* was one of his country's best-ever players and is now in his second spell as national boss. The first did not end well.

Key Player

This is surely the last chance for the two-time Asian Player of the Year and talented playmaker Server Djeparov to make global waves.

North Korea

Things are going well but this tournament may come a little too early for a talented new generation. Even so, a solid and well-drilled team has the potential to do well.

Coach

Yun Jong-su has been around the national team for some years, but due to comments made after the Asian Games in September he will be banned from the dressing room and dugout at the Asian Cup.

Key Player

Jong Il-gwan *(above)* is the goalscoring hope and the 2010 Young Asian Player of the Year is maturing into a dangerous all-round striker.

GROUP C

Iran

Looking for a first continental title since 1976 and, with an experienced team still fresh after the World Cup, they will be tough to beat. Solid at the back, their chances depend on finding their goalscoring touch.

Coach

Carlos Queiroz has the experience to deliver the title but it remains to be seen whether he can produce a more creative and aggressive team.

Key Player

Fleet-footed forward Reza Ghoochannejhad *(above)* is Iran's best chance of goals, especially on the counter-attack. When in the mood, he's direct and decisive.

Bahrain

The men from Manama are having all kinds of problems and even finished below Yemen in the recent Gulf Cup, ending up goalless and coachless. There is talent but confidence is at rock bottom.

Coach

Assistant Marjan Eid has made the step up to become the national side's third coach in four months after Adnan Hamad was fired. He has a big job on his hands.

Key Player

Saudi-based striker Ismail Abdul-latif *(above)* has been Bahrain's main goal threat in recent years but he can't do it without the service.

Qatar

Asia's form team, they won the West Asian Cup in January 2014 and the tougher Gulf Cup in November. Increasingly creative in attack and solid at the back, a lack of belief has been a problem in the past.

Coach

Djamel Belmadi was a surprise choice early this year, but the 38-year-old Algerian has infused belief and a cutting edge into the team.

Key Player

Khalfan Ibrahim *(above)* is still just 26 and the winger has gone from strength to strength since being named Asian Player of the Year in 2006. Can make goals out of nothing.

UAE

On their day, the best team to watch in West Asia and are threatening to break into the top tier of Asian football. The players that impressed at the 2012 Olympics are now approaching their peak.

Coach

Local tactician Mahdi Ali *(above)* has risen through the age levels with his players and knows them well. Has built a team that play good football.

Key Player

Omar Abdulrahman is the hottest property on the continent. The playmaker makes the team tick and plenty more besides. This is a real chance to show what he can do.

GROUP D

Japan

Determined to show that the 2014 World Cup was a blip and take a fifth title in seven tournaments. The European-based players are playing well, although the defence still looks a little vulnerable.

Coach

Not all thought the Mexican, Javier Aguirre, was the right man and not all have been won over. Experiments didn't work so well but a recall of the old guard brought a return to form.

Key Player

Keisuke Honda *(above)* was out of sorts in June but has made up for it since with Milan. At his best, he makes the others step up too.

Jordan

One of Asia's most improved teams, even if that is mostly down to impressive home form. Like to keep things tight at the back and hit on the counter-attack. May not have the firepower to get too far.

Coach

Ray Wilkins *(above)* was something of a surprise appointment in September and he has had little time to stamp his authority. No wins in his first five games and just two goals.

Key Player

In a team that does not score too many, creative talent Odel Al Saify is a valued and experienced winger who whips in a wicked cross.

Iraq

The 2007 champions are the most unpredictable side in Asia. There is no shortage of talent but it does not always show itself and they finished in last place in their Gulf Cup group.

Coach

Former international defender Radhi Shenaishil was given permission by club side Qatar SC to take charge for the finals. He previously coached Iraq's national side in 2009.

Key Player

Just 18 but already with plenty of experience, midfielder Humam Tariq *(above)* has the vision to see things others do not and the skill to make it happen. Destined for big things.

Palestine

It is always a little patronising to say that a team is just happy to be here, but in Palestine's case it really is true. Reached a first-ever Asian Cup by defeating Philippines in the AFC Challenge Cup.

Coach

Jamal Mahmoud has done much to foster the rise of Palestine but resigned in September leaving Saeb Jendeya in temporary charge. His lack of experience is a worry.

Key Player

Tricky striker Ashraf Nu'man got the historic goal against Philippines to book this Australia trip. Has the big-game temperament.

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP: FINALS

Hands on the prize...the African Nations Cup could throw up a surprise finalist as it did in the last two tournaments, with 2012 winners Zambia and 2013 runners-up Burkina Faso

We need football worthy of a finals

This year's African Nations Cup finals are bound to be something of an organisational minefield. But the sort of on-field drama the tournament has not witnessed in a while will hopefully overshadow any off-field difficulties.

The complexities of a late switch in host nation ensures that the 30th edition of Africa's top sports event will be no smooth ride, with a potentially majestic tournament in Morocco having been replaced by an emergency effort in a country without many resources – except the cold cash of their new-found oil revenues.

Equatorial Guinea's generous decision to step in as substitute hosts at least ensures that the tournament gets to be played in Africa – rather than the bizarre prospect of it going to Qatar, which had been the fall-back option once it became clear that CAF were not going to entertain Morocco's request for the 2015 finals to be postponed.

But the small former Spanish colony, which will use four venues for the 16-team tournament, proved barely capable of hosting eight teams just three years ago when they co-hosted the Nations Cup with neighbouring Gabon.

A phalanx of CAF officials were parachuted into the country days after Equatorial Guinea agreed to replace Morocco as hosts in order to help set up and supervise the local organisational structures. But they have had just under two months to make ready the facilities for the teams, coaches and officials.

However, what the Nations Cup needs more than hotels, training pitches and the other niceties of tournament play is a three-week extravaganza of football. Despite all its charisma, and the players of individual class and fine technique, the last editions have proven mostly ponderous affairs, with the matches largely forgettable.

Too many have been boring repetitions of the same pattern: a tepid turnover of possession in midfield, little creativity in attack against well-drilled defences, and a dreadfully low percentage of efforts on target.

There is the hope that Equatorial Guinea 2015 might be remembered for excitement and drama rather than the stigma of the Ebola virus – the reason Morocco suddenly sought a change in the dates; perhaps in a similar fashion to the football fiesta in Brazil last summer and the way the on-field theatre quickly erased memories of the violent demonstrations and political turmoil of the Confederation Cup in the same country the preceding year.

There has been enough evidence in the rapid fire Nations Cup qualifiers to suggest this is possible.

The change in the scheduling of the Nations Cup from every even to odd year left CAF with few dates to organise its preliminaries for the 2015 tournament and as a result the group competition was squashed into three months – two games in each of September, October and November.

It might run contrary to accepted methods of qualification for a major

> "If I say there will be no problems, I would be lying"
>
> **CAF president Issa Hayatou on the hasty relocation of the finals**

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP 2017

The hosts for the next Nations Cup finals are still to be decided after war-torn Libya pulled out in August, unable to guarantee they will be ready on time given the conflict raging since Muammar Gaddafi's overthrow. Four countries have since submitted bids for the 2017 tournament and a decision should be taken in January to appoint new hosts. The Confederation of African Football will decide between Algeria, Egypt, Gabon and Ghana. The 2019 finals are in Cameroon, 2021 in the Ivory Coast and 2023 in Guinea.

continental championship, where a two-year process is a fairer and a more honest barometer of proficiency, but the three-month blitz certainly held the public attention and left no outlet for the inertia that can often creep into the qualifiers.

During the three months of preliminary play, countries such as Cameroon, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia rekindled images of past glory and offered glimpses of championship-winning potential, while stalwarts like Ghana and the Ivory Coast showed signs of fragility.

Algeria went with the form book and were the most proficient side, with five wins from six group matches to confirm their position as the top African side in the FIFA rankings.

But they will not start as favourites because history dictates they tend to struggle in the testing climes of west Africa. It does not mean they have no chance to win, but it is from the ranks of Cameroon, Ghana, the Ivorians and Senegal that most pundits will choose their potential champions.

Given that the last two editions of the Nations Cup delivered surprise finalists – in 2012 winners Zambia and 2013 runners-up Burkina Faso – there is also the enhanced chance of a new name on the trophy, with Mali one of those who must be considered.

In the absence of holders Nigeria and record winners Egypt, no team stands out and the vagaries of the draw already ensure one of the more fancied teams will miss out on the knockout stage.

Two of Burkina Faso, Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon will advance to the last eight which would not have been likely had they not been paired together in Group A.

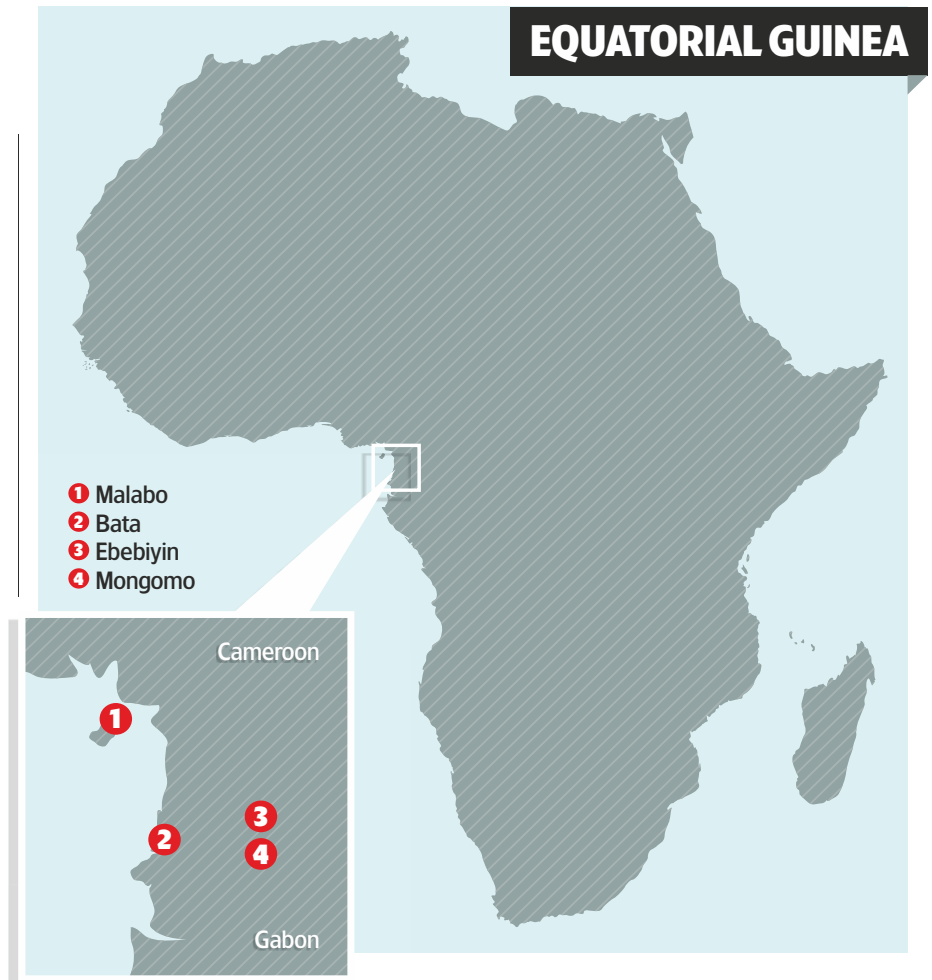
And had the draw turned out differently, all of the Group C sides – Algeria, Ghana, Senegal and South Africa – would have been expected to reach the quarter-finals.

Key to ensuring a decent three-week drama will be support. There will be hardly any travelling fans so it is essential the locals go to the games.

Equatorial Guineans did not turn up for any of the matches not involving their own team at the 2012 finals in Bata and Malabo, something CAF and the host nation need to solve, among all their other logistic challenges, before the tournament kicks off on January 18.

Mark Gleeson

● *For African Nations Cup fixtures, see page 84.*



Crowd issues...there was little local support for games not involving Equatorial Guinea at Malabo in 2012

TOP SCORERS IN QUALIFYING

Goals	Player
6	Jonathan Pitroipa (Burkina Faso)
5	Seydouba Soumah (Guinea)
4	Vincent Aboubakar (Cameroon)
	Salomon Kalou (Ivory Coast)
	Tokelo Rantie (South Africa)
3	Yacine Brahimi (Algeria)
	Clinton Njie (Cameroon)
	Malikc Evouma (Gabon)
	Mohamed Salah (Egypt)
	E Agyemang-Badu (Ghana)
	Asamoah Gyan (Ghana)
	Jeremy Bokila (DR Congo)

PAST TOURNAMENTS

Year	Winners	Hosts
1957	Egypt	Sudan
1959	Egypt	Egypt
1962	Ethiopia	Ethiopia
1963	Ghana	Ghana
1965	Ghana	Tunisia
1968	Congo-Kinshasa*	Ethiopia
1970	Sudan	Sudan
1972	Congo	Cameroon
1974	Zaire*	Egypt
1976	Morocco	Ethiopia
1978	Ghana	Ghana
1980	Nigeria	Nigeria
1982	Ghana	Libya
1984	Cameroon	Ivory Coast
1986	Egypt	Egypt
1988	Cameroon	Morocco
1990	Algeria	Algeria
1992	Ivory Coast	Senegal
1994	Nigeria	Tunisia
1996	South Africa	South Africa
1998	Egypt	Burkina Faso
2000	Cameroon	Ghana & Nigeria
2002	Cameroon	Mali
2004	Tunisia	Tunisia
2006	Egypt	Egypt
2008	Egypt	Ghana
2010	Egypt	Angola
2012	Zambia	Equatorial Guinea & Gabon
2013	Nigeria	South Africa

(* Congo-Kinshasa and Zaire now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo)

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP-WINNING COACHES

1957	Mourad Fahmy
1959	Josef Titkos
1962	Slavko Milosevic
1963	Charles Gyamfi
1965	Charles Gyamfi
1968	Ferenc Csandai
1970	Abdelfattah Hamad
1972	Adolph Bibanzulu
1974	Blagoje Vidinic
1976	Gheorge Mardarescu
1978	Fred Osam Duodu
1980	Otto Gloria
1982	Charles Gyamfi
1984	Rade Onganovic
1986	Mike Smith
1988	Claude Le Roy
1990	Abdelhamid Kermali
1992	Martial Yeo
1994	Clemens Westerhof
1996	Clive Barker
1998	Mohamed Al Gohari
2000	Pierre Lechantre
2002	Winfried Schafer
2004	Roger Lemerre
2006	Hassan Shehata
2008	Hassan Shehata
2010	Hassan Shehata
2012	Herve Renard
2013	Stephen Keshi

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP
The teams

GROUP A

Burkina Faso

They have not sat on their laurels since winning a surprise place in the Final of the 2013 African Nations Cup and have kept up a consistent standard of performance since. That same year they were only narrowly edged out of a World Cup place by Algeria. They finished second in qualifying, behind Gabon, who were the only team to beat them, and little has changed since the last Nations Cup – promising a consistency that is rare in African football. However, the surprise factor they had last time out has now obviously gone.

COACH

Belgian Paul Put was banned in his own country in 2007 for fixing matches involving his club, Lierse, with a Chinese betting syndicate. He has since been handed a prison sentence in absentia that he is appealing but which prevents him from returning home. He took over

as coach of the Gambia in 2008 and signed a three-year deal with Burkina Faso in 2012. He can do little wrong since he took them to the Nations Cup Final in 2013, which they lost 1-0 to Nigeria.

KEY PLAYERS

Six goals saw Jonathan Pitroipa end as the top scorer in the qualifiers, picking up where he left off at the 2013 Nations Cup, where he was player of the tournament. The nucleus of that side remains, with Charles Kabore *(above)* captaining from midfield, Bakary Kone the key central defender and Alain Traore, free from injury, leading the attack.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-4-2): Germain Sanou; Mohamed Koffi, Bakary Kone, Steeve Yago, Narcisse Bambara; Jonathan Zongo, Djakaridja Kone, Charles Kabore, Jonathan Pitroipa; Bertrand Traore; Alain Traore

Congo

The "Red Devils" return to the Nations Cup finals after a 14-year absence, offering veteran coach Claude Le Roy a chance to extend his record for the most number of tournament appearances to eight. Congo had a schizophrenic qualifying campaign, advancing through two rounds of preliminaries only after their opponents, Rwanda, had been caught fielding a player with a double identity. Although they inflicted Nigeria's first home defeat in a competitive international in 33 years, home defeats by South Africa and Nigeria saw them finish second in Group A.

COACH

Claude Le Roy has been working on the continent for almost 30 years and in that time coached at a record seven tournaments – the last in South Africa two years ago. The 66-year-old Frenchman has had a

record 31 matches at the finals and the last tournament, in 2013, marked the first time one of his teams had failed to reach the quarter-finals. Won it with Cameroon in 1988.

KEY PLAYERS

Giant centre-back Christopher Samba ended his international career before the start of qualifying, robbing the Congolese of key experience. But they did persuade former France junior international Thievy Bifouma *(above)* to play and he made an immediate impact with two goals in their famous away win over Nigeria. Key midfielder is Delvin Ndinga, of Greek champions Olympiakos.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-4-2): Christopher Mafoumbi; Igor Nganga, Marvin Baudry, Boris Moubio, Francis Nganga; Ladislas Douniama, Delvin Ndinga, Prince Oniangue, Francis Litsingi; Ferebory Dore, Thievy Bifouma

Equatorial Guinea

Expelled from the preliminaries having finally been tripped up after years of shipping in mercenaries to play for their national team, they are back in the field as the new hosts. And CAF conveniently overlooked the fact they had to forfeit their win over Mauritania in the first round of the preliminaries for fielding Thierry Fidjeu, who was capped by Cameroon at junior level. The team still has Colombians and Brazilians who they duplicitously claim have some blood link with the island but in fact are paid handsomely to travel to Africa for international duty in brazen cases of cheating that FIFA turns a blind eye to.

COACH

Former Spanish international defender Andoni Goikoetxea was appointed national team coach in March 2013. Dubbed the "Butcher of Bilbao" after infamous tackles on

Diego Maradona and Bernd Schuster in his playing days, the 58-year-old took over from Gilson Paulo of Brazil, who was in charge for Equatorial Guinea's only previous Nations Cup appearance, in 2012. This is his first job outside Spain.

KEY PLAYERS

Equatorial Guinea continue to find players in Spain, with Carlos Akapo and Ruben Belima among the latest. Emilio Nsue is their best-known player along with Javier Balboa *(above)*. It will be interesting to see if they are brazen enough to field their two naturalised Colombians – Jimmy Bermudez and Carlos Bejarano.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-4-2): Felipe Ovono; Carlos Akapo, Daniel Vazquez, Diosdado Mbele, Sipo; Emilio Nsue, Ben Konate, Juvenal Edjogo, Ruben Belima; Randy,

Gabon

Top of their group and unbeaten in qualifying, Gabon look a dangerous outsider. They edged out Burkina Faso and proved far too strong for Angola, and in Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang *(right)* of Borussia Dortmund they have a potential superstar. Gabon did not make the 2013 finals but return again with a competent- looking side and will compete in Bata, which is just across the border and offers the opportunity for considerable support. This will be the sixth Nations Cup finals for the oil-rich central African country, who also got to the quarter-finals in 1996.

COACH

The 43-year-old Jorge Costa, who won 50 caps for Portugal and spent a season at Charlton Athletic in 2001, was appointed in July. The former Porto defensive legend, who was part of the golden generation for his country that also included Luis Figo

and Rui Costa, began his coaching career at Braga and has also worked in Romania and Cyprus. He was back in Portugal last season, at Pacos de Ferreira, before a first job in Africa and his first with a national team.

KEY PLAYERS

The squad has seen a significant transformation since their last Nations Cup appearance three years ago, although stalwarts like Didier Ovono, Bruno Ecuele Manga and Aubameyang remain. Fringe players like Lloyd Palun and Levy Madinda are now regulars, and Johann Obiang and Didier Ndong among the new faces in the set-up.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-4-2): Didier Ovono: Lloyd Palun, Bruno Ecuele Manga, Henri Ndong, Johann Obiang; Levy Madinda, Didier Ndong, Andre Biyogo Poko, Frederic Bulot; Pierre Aubameyang, Romaric Rogombe

GROUP B

Cape Verde Islands

The smallest nation ever to qualify for a Nations Cup finals are back for a second successive appearance, looking firmly like they belong in elite company. They played beyond expectations in 2013 to get to the quarter-finals, highlighted by their coach breaking into song at the press conference after advancing from the first round. Luis Antunes has since moved on but the Cape Verdians have got even stronger. They were credible performers in the World Cup qualifiers and finished top of their 2015 Nations Cup qualifying group, winning four of their six games.

COACH

The 54-year-old Rui Aguas played extensively and scored liberally for Benfica and Porto, appearing in the 1988 European Cup Final, which Benfica lost to PSV. His first foray into management was with Estoril and Vitoria Setubal, but he then worked as an assistant to Jesualdo Ferreira at

Braga and with Artur Jorge when he was Portugal coach. Cape Verde is his first job as a senior coach in almost a decade. His job application was helped by the fact that his wife is from the islands.

KEY PLAYERS

Babanco *(above)* is the pivot of the 4-3-3 that Aguas used in the qualifiers, with Heldon and Ze Luis as the key attackers. All of the squad now come from outside Cape Verde. Most are from European clubs, although several are based in Angola, such as goalkeeper Vozinha and defensive midfielder Calu. At least half of the squad from the 2013 Nations Cup should return.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-3-3): Vozinha; Carlitos, Fernando Varela, Gege, Nivaldo; Calu, Babanco, Odair Fortes; Ze Luis, Heldon, Djaniny

DR Congo

Slipped into the finals as the best third-place finisher in qualifying. Behind Cameroon and Ivory Coast in a tough Group D, they did manage a thrilling 4-3 away win in Abidjan over the Ivorians in October. The country has been through a boon at club level, with two semi-finalists in the 2014 CAF Champions League, but remain inconsistent at national level. One of Africa's biggest countries with vast resources and massive human potential, it remains mired in conflict and corruption, with the inevitable impact on the national team.

COACH

Jean Florent Ibenge Ikwenge was appointed in August 2014, just three weeks before the start of qualifying. The 52-year-old had previously been the assistant to Claude Le Roy, but his role with the national side was overshadowed by his work with Kinshasa side AS Vita Cub, who

he steered to the African Champions League Final in November. Ibenge is Congolese born but grew up in France and played in Belgium, France and Germany.

KEY PLAYERS

Captain Youssouf Mulumbu *(above)* now has Premier League company in the form of Yannick Bolasie. It means the decision of Dieumerci Mbokani to no longer play for the team has not had as big a negative impact as expected. The English-based pair will be the key performers, along with centre-back Chancel Mbemba who is in outstanding form this season in Belgium with Anderlecht.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-4-2): Robert Kidiaba; Issama Mpeko, Cedric Mongongu, Chancel Mbemba, Jean Kasusula; Cedric Mabwati, Youssouf Mulumbu, Distel Zola, Yannick Bolasie; Neeskens Kebano, Jeremy Bokila

Tunisia

Unbeaten in the qualifiers and topped a group that included Senegal and Egypt. They have shown a marked improvement in confidence from the side that only made the World Cup qualifying play-offs in late 2013 because of a sanction for Cape Verde – who they now meet again in the Nations Cup finals. Tunisia have bounced back well since a coaching change to make their 16th finals' appearance. Their only success was in 2004, when they were hosts.

COACH

George Leekens *(above right)* has twice been national coach of his native Belgium and also spent one year in charge of Algeria. He led Belgium to the 1998 World Cup and was coach again from 2010 to 2012, but surprisingly quit for a job at Club Brugge which was then a better proposition than the national-team job. His club coaching career in

Belgium has been extensive and he also worked at Trabzonspor in Turkey, Roda JC in Holland and Al Hilal in Saudi Arabia.

KEY PLAYERS

Leekens has a relatively young and inexperienced squad but says there is huge potential: "They could all certainly compete at the sub-top in Europe. As far as mentality and character goes, they are one of the best groups I've ever trained." They will have two midfielders in front of the back four and then two ahead of them in Wahbi Khazri and Yassine Chikhaoui, who are both potential match winners.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-5-1): Aymen Mathlouthi; Hamza Mathlouthi, Aymen Abdennour, Syman Ben Youssef, Ali Maaloul; Fakhreddine Ben Youssef, Stephane Nater, Yassine Chikhaoui, Hocine Ragued, Wahbi Khazri; Saber Khalifa

Zambia

Tried to cling onto their 2012 Nations Cup-winning team for as long as they could as they sought to qualify for the World Cup in Brazil but fell short. This meant that the chance to ease out some of their ageing stars and introduce fresher talent in the wake of winning Africa's top prize was lost and they had to undergo a dramatic overhaul going into the 2015 Nations Cup qualifying campaign with potentially disastrous consequences. Honor Janza was appointed coach after the departure of Herve Renard and then his trusty assistant Patrice Beaumelle. Zambia struggled through the first half of the group phase, unable to register a win but bounced back strongly to win their last three games and finish second behind the Cape Verde Islands.

COACH

Honor Janza was termed "interim coach" and only gave him a mandate

until November when Zambia appointed him in August. Now he has a rolling deal but with a chance to force a permanent contract. Was an assistant to Renard when Zambia won the 2012 Nations Cup, but at club level has only a brief spell in charge at Zesco United when they were in the Zambia second division.

KEY PLAYERS

Of the 2012 African Nations Cup winning side, several return for yet another Nations Cup: Kennedy Mweene *(above)*, Davies Nkausu, Rainford Kalaba and Emmanuel Mayuka. Centre-back and captain Stopilla Sunzu is battling to be fit.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-4-2): Kennedy Mweene; Davies Nkausu, Stopilla Sunzu, Nyambe Mulenga, Emmanuel Mbola; Lubambo Musonda, Nathan Sinkala, Given Singuluma, Rainford Kalaba; Ronald Kampamba, Emmanuel Mayuka

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP
The teams

GROUP C

Algeria

Africa's top-rated team moved up to 18th in the FIFA rankings on the back of a first appearance in the knockout stage of the World Cup. They then kept up their winning ways despite a change of coach in mid-year, with Vahid Halilhodzic departing and Frenchman Christian Gourcuff taking over. The team has stayed intact and grown markedly in confidence. It is also bristling with talent, with Yacine Brahimi emerging as a key figure. Algeria would have been a strong favourite were the finals still in Morocco but they do not have a good record in tournaments south of the Sahara.

COACH

Christian Gourcuff had long been earmarked to take over after the World Cup but only officially began on August 1. He has a contract until the end of the next World Cup, which means he will also be in charge for

the Nations Cups in 2015 and 2017 – one of which Algeria hope to host. He coached Lorient in Ligue 1 for more than a decade.

KEY PLAYERS

Yacine Brahimi won this year's BBC African Footballer of the Year award. His midfield link play with Sofiane Feghouli will be a key element, with Mehdi Lacen restored to the defensive midfield role after little playing time during the World Cup. Islam Slimani *(above)* of Porto leads the attack. Rafik Halliche has taken over as defensive linchpin from Majid Bougherra, who is now more of an inspirational squad member.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-2-2-2): Rais Mbolhi; Aissa Mandi, Rafik Halliche, Carl Medjani, Faouzi Ghoulam; Mehdi Lacen, Nabil Bentaleb; Yacine Brahimi, Sofiane Feghouli; Islam Slimani, El Arbi Soudani

Ghana

Ghana have plunged from a position of strong self-belief and rampant expectation to having to pick up the pieces after a tough World Cup – at which they did themselves no favours with an undignified strike over money – and a stuttering start to Nations Cup qualifying. It was no surprise that coach Kwesi Appiah lost his job, with assistant Maxwell Konadu in charge for the rest of the qualifiers. Avram Grant has since been appointed and he will have little time to get to know his players before being thrust into a tough opening group.

COACH

Avram Grant came within a penalty kick of leading Chelsea to Champions League glory in 2008 and the possibility of a much larger international profile. Since his time in England he has taken Partizan Belgrade to the 2012 Serbian title during a brief tenure. Earlier in his

career he had much success with Maccabi Tel Aviv. Six months ago he was a pundit for Israeli television at the World Cup.

KEY PLAYERS

Kevin-Prince Boateng, Michael Essien and Sulley Muntari were axed after World Cup histrionics but Ghana patched up problems with the Ayew brothers, Andre and Jordan, who were key figures in the qualifiers along with stalwart Asamoah Gyan *(above)*. Goalkeeping is a problem area but they have settled on Brimah Razak, who plays in Spain's lower leagues. The versatile Kwadwo Asamoah is out after surgery in early December.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-4-2): Brimah Razak; Harrison Afful, John Boye, Jonathan Mensah, Baba Abdul Rahman; Christian Atsu, Emmanuel Agyemang-Badu, Rabiu Mohammed, Andre Ayew; Jordan Ayew, Asamoah Gyan

Senegal

Senegal have the potential to be continental champions but often punch below their weight. However, Alain Giresse has made progress in his efforts to turn the west Africans into a stronger force. He has made them realise places have to be fought for and has instilled a more disciplined approach. This generation could match the achievements of the team built by Bruno Metsu that reached the World Cup quarter-finals in 2002 – the same year Senegal had their best Nations Cup finish when they reached the Final in Mali.

COACH

Alain Giresse took over two years ago, having taken Mali to third place at the 2012 finals. This will be his third Nations Cup. He also coached Gabon in 2010, narrowly missing out on the last eight. He played in the World Cup with France and was a member of their 1984 European

Championship- winning side. His coaching career has included spells at Toulouse and Paris Saint-Germain as well as Royal Armed Forces of Morocco and Georgia's national team.

KEY PLAYERS

Senegal are beginning to draw more heavily from the growing number of players born in France. There is great competition up front, so players such as Demba Ba, Mame Biriam Diouf and Moussa Sow might have to start on the bench. Dame Ndoye and Sadio Mane *(above)* were particularly creative in the qualifiers. Cover at full-back and in goal is on the threadbare side.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-5-1): Bouna Coundoul; Lamine Sane, Papa Djilobodji, Kara Mbodji, Pape Souare; Dame Ndoye, Papakouli Diop, Mohamed Diame, Cheikhou Kouyate, Sadio Mane; Papiss Cisse

South Africa

The last Nations Cup hosts may have disappointed in the last decade, but they are on the rise again under Ephraim Mashaba, who really has World Cup qualification for Russia 2018 as his priority. He has chosen a side all under the age of 27, including several left-field choices from the lower leagues and youth-team ranks, but in spite of considerable scepticism, they have new momentum. Mashaba's role as a father figure helped the squad to overcome the tragic loss of stand-in captain Senzo Meyiwa, who was shot in a botched robbery in October.

COACH

Ephraim "Shakes" Mashaba was a leading player in the domestic league in the 1970s and 80s. He became assistant national coach and later steered the under-23s to a famous victory over Brazil at the 2000 Olympics. He became national coach

in 2002 only to be fired just before the 2004 Nations Cup. The 64-year-old was brought back in recent years to again coach the under-20s, and when negotiations with Carlos Queiroz failed in August, he was offered the senior job.

KEY PLAYERS

South Africa may not have the best players in each position but they hope those they blood will gain invaluable experience. Thulani Serero is arguably key, although often wasted by Mashaba on the right. Dean Furman *(above)* may play in the English third tier for Doncaster Rovers but he has impressed with his application.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-3-3): Darren Keet; Anele Ngcongca, Mulomowandau Mathoho, Tefu Mashamaite, Thabo Matlaba; Andile Jali, Dean Furman, Oupa Manyisa; Thulani Serero, Tokelo Rantie, Bongani Ndulula

GROUP D

Cameroon

Have undergone a dramatic turnabout since the World Cup finals, which were an embarrassing episode characterised by squabbling over money, personality clashes and violent play. Amid the resultant clear-out of players, coach Volker Finke doggedly held onto his job and refused to bow to public demand. Loudest of the firing squad was Roger Milla, but all have now been silenced by the vast improvement in form and Finke enjoys begrudging admiration as Cameroon dominated a strong qualifying group. Only Egypt have a better Nations Cup record than Cameroon, who were winners in 1984, 1988, 2000 and 2002.

COACH

Finke was appointed after 16 years at Freiburg, during which time he saw them promoted and relegated three times in the longest single

coaching spell in German professional football. He has a two-year deal which ends in June and is fluent in English and French.

KEY PLAYERS

Vincent Aboubakar quickly stepped into the striking void left by Samuel Eto'o but it was the newcomers who stole the show. Fabrice Ondoua, Jerome Guihoata and Clinton Njie *(above)* were thrust into the heat of battle with little or no senior experience but came through with flying colours. Stephane Mbia has taken up the leadership role vacated by Eto'o and Nicolas Nkoulou could blossom into a major star.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-4-2): Fabrice Ondoua; Stephane Mbia, Nicolas Nkoulou, Jerome Guihoata, Henri Bedimo; Clinton Njie, Eyong Enoh, Benjamin Moukandjo, Edgar Salli; Leonard Kwueke, Vincent Aboubakar

Guinea

Qualification came against massive odds as the ravages of the Ebola virus in the country saw Guinea banned from hosting any qualifiers. They staged games in a virtually empty stadium in Casablanca and won one and drew two of their "home" matches, but they did suffer intense prejudice and twice a day they had to have their temperature checked in Morocco by health authorities. "Some measures we've felt have been discriminatory," said coach Michel Dussuyer. Guinea's best Nations Cup was in 1976 when they were runners-up to Morocco.

COACH

It is a second spell in charge of Guinea for 55-year-old Frenchman Dussuyer *(above)* and a fifth time at the Nations Cup. He led them to the quarter-finals in 2004 and was assistant to fellow countryman Henri Michel when Ivory Coast were

runners-up two years later. In 2010 he qualified Benin for the tournament, then went back to Guinea, taking them to the 2012 finals. Dussuyer has also coached French club Cannes in between his African assignments.

KEY PLAYERS

The squad is mostly made up of European-based players. Ibrahima Traore brings Bundesliga experience and Ibrahima Conte is from Belgian champions Anderlecht. Boubacar Fofana, who plays in Portugal, is an underrated defensive midfielder. Florentin Pogba is elder brother of France midfielder Paul Pogba.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-5-1): Naby Yattara; Baissama Sankoh, Mohamed Diarra, Florentin Pogba, Issaiaga Sylla; Ibrahima Conte, Thierno Bah, Boubacar Fofana, Naby Keita, Ibrahima Traore; Idrissa Sylla

Ivory Coast

Ivory Coast eased themselves over the qualifying line in a series of displays that asked more questions than it answered. It left new coach Herve Renard recalling two old stalwarts, Kolo Toure and Didier Zokora, and bidding to entice Didier Drogba back too. The Frenchman replaced Sabri Lamouchi after the World Cup but has a delicate task of replacing an ageing generation. For the last five tournaments the Elephants have been strong favourites but will go into this tournament with no such status.

COACH

Renard, 46, returned to take charge of Zambia for a second spell just before the 2012 Nations Cup and led them to their first continental title. He had left after the 2010 tournament to become coach of Angola, but was fired after just six months and moved on to USM Alger in Algeria. His second spell

with Zambia ended after failure to qualify for the 2014 World Cup but he was hired by Sochaux, who he almost saved from Ligue 1 relegation in May. He was appointed Ivorian coach after the World Cup.

KEY PLAYERS

Kolo Toure, Yaya Toure and Siaka Tiene will play in a sixth successive finals, with Gervinho *(above)* and Salomon Kalou going to a fifth in a row. That means considerable experience but there are also gaping holes that make the Ivorians much less of a force. Boubacar Barry has lost his place in goal after over a decade and centre-backs Ousmane Viera and Kolo Toure do not inspire.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-2-3-1): Mande Sayouba; Serge Aurier, Ousmane Viera, Kolo Toure; Siaka Tiene; Serey Die, Cheikh Tiote; Salomon Kalou, Yaya Toure, Gervinho; Wilfried Bony

Mali

After two successive third-placed finishes, Mali hope to kick on and prove their ability at this Nations Cup despite an inconsistent qualifying campaign. Mali have only played at eight Nations Cup tournaments, but on six of those occasions reached the final four. They were runners-up in 1972 and semi-finalists in 1992, 2002 (as hosts), 2004, 2012 and 2013.

COACH

Polish-born Henryk Kasperczak, 61, returns to take charge at his sixth Nations Cup finals, having already taken a team to the Final. The former World Cup defender was the coach of Ivory Coast at the 1994 finals, Tunisia two years later, Morocco in 2000, Mali when they hosted the 2002 finals and Senegal in 2008. He steered a youthful Tunisia to a surprise appearance in the 1996 finals, where they lost to

hosts South Africa. He held the record for most number of matches coached at the finals before it was broken by Frenchman Claude Le Roy in 2006.

KEY PLAYERS

Mali have retained 10 players from their last Nations Cup squad, even if they are over-reliant on Seydou Keita *(above)* and Bordeaux forward Cheick Dibate, whose knees have troubled him recently and could miss the tournament. Drissa Diakite and Adama Tamboura are 10-year veterans while centre-back Salif Coulibaly could emerge as one of the finds of the competition.

LIKELY STARTING XI (4-2-3-1): Oumar Sissoko; Drissa Diakite, Molla Wague, Salif Coulibaly, Adama Tamboura; Tongo Doumbia, Yacouba Sylla; Sigamarry Diarra, Seydou Keita, Sambou Yatabare; Cheick Diabate

ESM ELEVEN

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

JANUARY 2015

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Gianluigi BUFFON (Juventus)	11 votes
Manuel NEUER (Bayern Munich)	11
Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	5
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	4
Claudio BRAVO (Barcelona)	2
ROBERTO (Olympiakos)	2
Sergio ALVAREZ (Celta Vigo)	1
Jasmin HANDANOVIC (Maribor)	1
Steve MANDANDA (Marseille)	1

DEFENDERS

PEPE (Real Madrid)	11
Branislav IVANOVIC (Chelsea)	10
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	9
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	7
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	6
Jeremy MATHIEU (Barcelona)	6
MIRANDA (Atletico Madrid)	6
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	5
Juan BERNAT (Bayern Munich)	5
Nathaniel CLYNE (Southampton)	5
Stephan LICHTSTEINER (Juventus)	5
Jerome BOATENG (Bayern Munich)	4
JUANFRAN (Atletico Madrid)	4
David LUIZ (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	4
Nicolas N'KOULOU (Marseille)	4
Ricardo RODRIGUEZ (Wolfsburg)	4
John TERRY (Chelsea)	4
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	3
Kostas MANOLAS (Roma)	3
Javier MASCHERANO (Barcelona)	3
NALDO (Wolfsburg)	3
Leighton BAINES (Everton)	2
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	2
Dani CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	2
Ashley COLE (Roma)	2
Jose FONTE (Southampton)	2
MAXWELL (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Valencia)	2
Paul VERHAEGH (Augsburg)	2
Pablo ZABALETA (Manchester City)	2
Toby ALDERWEIRELD (Southampton)	1
Davide ASTORI (Roma)	1
Alex BRUCE (Hull City)	1
Gary CAHILL (Chelsea)	1
CAICARA (Ludogorets)	1
CARLAO (APOEL)	1
Gael CLICHY (Manchester City)	1
DANILO (Porto)	1
Jose Luis GAYA (Valencia)	1
Kieran GIBBS (Arsenal)	1
Raphael GUERREIRO (Lorient)	1
Benedikt HOWEDES (Schalke)	1
Daryl JANMAAT (Newcastle United)	1
Tin JEDVAJ (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Manchester City)	1
Filipe LUIS (Chelsea)	1
MAICON (Roma)	1
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Philippe MEXES (Milan)	1
Alberto MORENO (Liverpool)	1
Dani PAREJO (Valencia)	1
RAFINHA (Bayern Munich)	1
Karium REFIK (PSV)	1
Winston REID (West Ham United)	1
Martin STRANZL (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Gregory VAN DER WIEL (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	1
WENDELL (Bayer Leverkusen)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Cesc FABREGAS (Chelsea)	20
Arjen ROBBEN (Bayern Munich)	16
Toni KROOS (Real Madrid)	11
Xabi ALONSO (Bayern Munich)	10
Mario GOTZE (Bayern Munich)	8
Philipp LAHM (Bayern Munich)	7
Paul POGBA (Juventus)	5
Kevin DE BRUYNE (Wolfsburg)	4
ISCO (Real Madrid)	4
James RODRIGUEZ (Real Madrid)	4
Angel DI MARIA (Manchester United)	3
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	3
NANI (Sporting Lisbon)	3
Andrea PIRLO (Juventus)	3
Miralem PJANIC (Roma)	3
Yaya TOURE (Manchester City)	3
ARDA Turan (Atletico Madrid)	2
Jose Maria CALLEJON (Napoli)	2
Giannelli IMBULA (Marseille)	2
KOKE (Atletico Madrid)	2
Thomas MULLER (Bayern Munich)	2
Radja NAINGGOLAN (Roma)	2
Gareth BALE (Real Madrid)	1
Karim BELLARABI (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Denis CHERYSHEV (Villarreal)	1
Yoann GOURCUFF (Lyon)	1
Hector HERRERA (Porto)	1
Frank LAMPARD (Manchester City)	1
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	1
David SILVA (Manchester City)	1
Wesley SNEIJDER (Galatasaray)	1
Talisca (BENFICA)	1
Granit XHAKA (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1

FORWARDS

Cristiano RONALDO (Real Madrid)	38
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	19
Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	16
Diego COSTA (Chelsea)	15
Karim BENZEMA (Real Madrid)	6
NEYMAR (Barcelona)	6
Graziano PELLE (Southampton)	5
Carlos TEVEZ (Juventus)	5
Luiz ADRIANO (Shakhtar Donetsk)	2
Andre-Pierre GIGNAC (Marseille)	2
Diafra SAKHO (West Ham United)	2
Francesco TOTTI (Roma)	2
Paco ALCACER (Valencia)	1
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	1
Dimitry PAYET (Marseille)	1
Alexis SANCHEZ (Arsenal)	1
Danny WELBECK (Arsenal)	1

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

The members of ESM are: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Elf* (Holland), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allegmeine Zeitung* (Germany), *Goal News* (Greece), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *So Foot* (France), *Sport* (Belgium), *Sport Express* (Russia), *De Telegraaf* (Holland), *TIPSbladet* (Denmark), *World Soccer* (England). More details of votes at **worldsoccer.com/votes**

BULGARIA

Bottle ban for defender

Lokomotiv Plovdiv's Diyan Moldovanov was banned for 10 games for trying to hit a referee with a bottle.

The centre-half, who had been substituted, was shown a red card after he ran onto the pitch to confront Stanislav Stavrov at the end of his side's 1-1 draw at home to Cherno More. He then threw a bottle at the official.

CROATIA

Hajduk refuse to play

League leaders Dinamo Zagreb were awarded a 3-0 win over arch-rivals Hajduk Split when the visitors refused to play their league game at Maksimir Stadium.

Around 60 Hajduk fans who made the trip were known troublemakers and therefore banned from entering the stadium. This prompted the rest of the visiting support to boycott the match in a show of solidarity. Hajduk's players then joined the protest and the game was cancelled.

Protest...Hajduk supporters

GEORGIA

More glory for Dinamo

Defending champions Dinamo Tbilisi, who went into the winter break on top of the table, won the Georgian Super Cup with a 1-0 victory over Chikhura Sachkhere, the team they beat in last season's Cup Final. Xisco Munoz scored the injury-time winner.

Club Results

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Nov 26
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 4 (Raul Garcia 9, Mandzukic 38, 62, 65)
Olympiakos (Gre) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 40,121. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Atletico: Moya - Juanfran, Gimenez, Godin, Ansaldi, Tiago (Mario Suarez 46), Gabi, Raul Garcia, Koke, Arda (Jimenez 66), Mandzukic (Griezmann 69).
Olympiakos: Roberto - Elabdellaoui, Botia, Abidal, Masuaku, N'Dinga, Maniatis (David Fuster 46), Milivojevic, Dominguez (Bouchalakis 72), Afellay (Kasami 46), Mitroglou.

Nov 26
Malmo (Swe) 0
Juventus (Ita) 2 (Llorente 49, Tevez 88)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,500. **Ref:** Proenca (Por)
Malmo: Olsen - Tinnerholm (Rakip 85), Johansson, Helander, Ricardinho, Halsti, Adu, Eriksson, Forsberg, Thelin (Cibicki 70), Rosenberg. *Sent off: Johansson 89.*
Juventus: Buffon - Lichtsteiner, Bonucci, Chiellini, Padoin, Pirlo, Marchisio (Pereyra 83), Pogba, Vidal, Llorente (Morata 72), Tevez.

Dec 9
Juventus 0
Atletico Madrid 0
Att: 39,219. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Juventus: Buffon - Lichtsteiner, Bonucci, Chiellini, Evra, Vidal, Pirlo, Pogba, Pereyra, Llorente, Tevez.
Atletico: Moya - Siqueira, Godin, Gimenez, Juanfran, Koke, Gabi, Mario Suarez, Arda, Raul Garcia, Mandzukic.

Dec 9
Olympiakos 4 (David Fuster 22, Dominguez 63, Mitroglou 87, Afellay 90)
Malmo 2 (Kroon 59, Rosenberg 81)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 27,562. **Ref:** Lannoy (Fra)
Olympiakos: Roberto - Elabdellaoui, Botia, Abidal, Masuaku, N'Dinga, Maniatis, David Fuster (Afellay 77), Dominguez (Siovas 90), Kasami, Mitroglou (Benitez 88).
Malmo: Olsen - Ricardinho, Halsti, Helander, Konate (Kroon 57), Eriksson (Thern 75), Adu, Tinnerholm, Forsberg, Rosenberg, Thelin (Cibicki 80). *Sent off: Adu 90+3.*

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Madrid (Q)	6	4	1	1	14	3	13
Juventus (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Olympiakos[1]	6	3	0	3	10	13	9
Malmo	6	1	0	5	4	15	3

Group B

Nov 26
Basle (Swi) 0
Real Madrid (Spa) 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo 35)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 36,000. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Basle: Vaclik - Degen (Hamoudi 76), Schar, Suchy, Safari, Frei (Diaz 83), El Neny, Zuffi (Kakitani 87), Gonzalez, Gashi, Embolo.
Real Madrid: Navas - Arbeloa, Varane, Sergio Ramos, Fabio Coentrao, Isco (Nacho 90), Kroos, Rodriguez (Marcelo 89), Bale, Cristiano Ronaldo, Benzema (Illarramendi 71).

Nov 26
Ludogorets (Bul) 2 (Dani Abalo 3, Terziev 88)
Liverpool (Eng) 2 (Lambert 8, Henderson 37)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 37,143. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)
Ludogorets: Stoyanov - Junior Caicara, Moti, Terziev, Minev, Dyakov, Fabio Espinho (Hamza 81), Misidjan, Marcelinho, M Aleksandrov (Wanderson 72), Dani Abalo (Junior Quixada 69).
Liverpool: Mignolet - Johnson, Skrtel, Toure, Javi Manquillo, Gerrard, Henderson, Lucas, Allen, Lambert, Sterling (Moreno 82).

Dec 9
Liverpool 1 (Gerrard 81)
Basle 1 (Frei 25)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 43,290. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)
Liverpool: Mignolet - Johnson, Lovren, Skrtel, Jose Enrique (Moreno 46), Lucas (Coutinho 74), Gerrard, Henderson, Allen, Sterling, Lambert (Markovic 46). *Sent off: Markovic 60.*
Basle: Vaclik - Safari, Suchy, Schar, Gashi, Frei, Zuffi (Samuel 88), El Neny (Diaz 83), Xhaka, Gonzalez, Streller (Embolo 74).

Dec 9
Real Madrid 4 (Cristiano Ronaldo pen 20, Bale 38, Arbeloa 80, Medran 88)
Ludogorets 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 58,393. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
Real Madrid: Navas - Arbeloa, Varane, Nacho, Fabio Coentrao (Marcelo 60), Bale (Medran 83), Illarramendi, Kroos (Jese 60), Isco, Cristiano Ronaldo, Hernandez.
Ludogorets: Stoyanov - Minev, Moti, Terziev, Junior Caicara, Fabio Espinho (Anicet 63), Dyakov, Misidjan (Junior Quixada 72), Marcelinho, M Aleksandrov (Wanderson 61), Dani Abalo. *Sent off: Marcelinho 19.*

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid (Q)	6	6	0	0	16	2	18
Basle (Q)	6	2	1	3	7	8	7
Liverpool[1]	6	1	2	3	5	9	5
Ludogorets	6	1	1	4	5	14	4

Group C

Nov 26
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 0
Monaco (Fra) 1 (Ocampos 72)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 26,230. **Ref:** Tagliavento (Ita)
Leverkusen: Leno - Donati, Toprak, Spahic, Wendell, Bender (Rolfes 76), Castro, Bellarabi (Brandt 76), Calhanoglu, Son (Drmic 59), Kiessling.
Monaco: Subasic - Raggi, Ricardo Carvalho, Abdennour, Echiejile, Toulalan, Bakayoko, Joao Moutinho, Dirar (Fabinho 83), Ferreira Carrasco (Ocampos 70), Berbatov (Traore 90).

Nov 26
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) 1 (Danny 79)
Benfica (Por) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 14,123. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)
Zenit: Lodygin - Anyukov, Garay, Lombaerts (Neto 23), Criscito, Javi Garcia (Fayzulin 58), Witsel, Hulk, Ryazantsev (Shatov 65), Danny, Rondon.
Benfica: Julio Cesar - Pereira, Luisao, Jardel, Andre Almeida, Samaris (John 82), Perez, Talisca (Derley 70), Lima, Salvio, Gaitan. *Sent off: Luisao 90+2.*

Dec 9
Benfica 0
Bayer Leverkusen 0
Att: 17,564. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Bls)
Benfica: Artur - Andre Almeida, Lopez, Cesar, Benito, Cristante, Tiago (Joao Teixeira 87), John, Pizzi, Lima (Talisca 62), Derley (Nelson Oliveira 76).
Leverkusen: Leno - Hilbert, Spahic, Toprak, Boenisch, Castro, Rolfes (Kiessling 83), Bellarabi, Calhanoglu, Kruse (Brandt 46), Drmic (Son 71). *Sent off: Toprak 90.*

Dec 9
Monaco 2 (Abdennour 63, Fabinho 89)
Zenit St Petersburg 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 11,319. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)
Monaco: Subasic - Fabinho, Wallace, Abdennour, Raggi, Toulalan, Bakayoko, Joao Moutinho, Dirar (Bernardo Silva 90), Ferreira Carrasco (Ocampos 90+2), Berbatov (Martial 56).
Zenit: Lodygin - Criscito, Lombaerts, Garay, Smolnikov (Ryazantsev 79), Javi Garcia, Fayzulin (Shatov 68), Danny, Witsel, Hulk, Rondon.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco (Q)	6	3	2	1	4	1	11
Leverkusen (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Zenit[1]	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
Benfica	6	1	2	3	2	6	5

Group D

Nov 26
Anderlecht (Blg) 2 (Mbemba 44, 86)
Galatasaray (Tur) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 19,857. **Ref:** Bebek (Cro)
Anderlecht: Proto - Vanden Borre, Mbemba, Deschacht, Acheampong, Defour (Kawaya 46), Tielemans, Najar, Praet (Kljestan 84), Conte, Mitrovic (Cyriac 89).
Galatasaray: Muslera - Camdal, Chedjou, Semih, Alex Telles, Felipe Melo, Selcuk, Altintop (Furkan 90), Sneijder, Bruma (Umut 75), Burak. *Sent off: Selcuk 83.*

Nov 26
Arsenal (Eng) 2 (Sanogo 2, Sanchez 57)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 59,902. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Arsenal: Martinez - Chambers, Mertesacker, Monreal, Gibbs, Arteta (Flamini 67), Oxlade-Chamberlain (Campbell 90), Ramsey, Cazorla, Sanchez, Sanogo (Podolski 79).
Dortmund: Weidenfeller - Piszczek, Subotic, Ginter, Schmelzer, Gundogan, Bender, Mkhitaryan, Grosskreutz (Jojic 79), Aubameyang (Ramos 61), Immobile (Kagawa 61).

Dec 9
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Immobile 58)
Anderlecht 1 (Mitrovic 84)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 65,851. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Dortmund: Langerak - Durm, Subotic, Ginter, Schmelzer (Aubameyang 75), Gundogan (Kirch 66), Sahin, Mkhitaryan, Kagawa (Blaszczykowski 84), Grosskreutz, Immobile.
Anderlecht: Proto - Vanden Borre, Mbemba, Deschacht, N'Sakala, Dendoncker, Kljestan (Tielemans 69), Conte (Cyriac 79), Praet, Acheampong, Mitrovic (Heylen 89).

Dec 9
Galatasaray 1 (Sneijder 89)
Arsenal 4 (Podolski 3, 90+2, Ramsey 11, 29)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 20,590. **Ref:** Fernandez Borbalan (Spa)
Galatasaray: Sinan - Camdal (Altintop 46), Semih, Hakan Balta, Alex Telles, Felipe Melo, Emre Colak, Bruma (Olcan 77), Sneijder, Burak (Oztekin 46), Umut.
Arsenal: Szczesny - Debuchy (O'Connor 77), Mertesacker, Chambers, Bellerin, Flamini (Zelalem 46), Oxlade-Chamberlain, Ramsey (Maitland-Niles 46), Campbell, Podolski, Sanogo.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dortmund (Q)	6	4	1	1	14	4	13
Arsenal (Q)	6	4	1	1	15	8	13
Anderlecht[1]	6	1	3	2	8	10	6
Galatasaray	6	0	1	5	4	19	1

Group E

Nov 25
CSKA Moscow (Rus) 1 (V Berezutsky 90+3)
Roma (Ita) 1 (Totti 43)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Played behind closed doors
CSKA: Akinfeev - Mario Fernandes, V Berezutsky, Ignashevich, Schennikov, Cauna (Milanov 64), Natcho, Musa (Tosic 81), Eremenko, Dzagoev, Doumbia.
Roma: De Sanctis - Florenzi, Manolas, Astori, Holebas, De Rossi, Keita, Nainggolan (Strootman 83), Gervinho (Iturbe 77), Totti, Ljajic (Pjanic 87).

Nov 25
Manchester City (Eng) 3 (Aguero pen 22, 85, 90+1)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 2 (Xabi Alonso 40, Lewandowski 45)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 44,510. **Ref:** Kralovec (CzR)
Man City: Hart - Sagna (Zabaleta 68), Kompany, Mangala, Clichy, Fernando, Jesus Navas, Lampard, Milner (Jovetic 66), Nasri, Aguero (Demichelis 90+4).
Bayern: Neuer - Rafinha, Boateng, Benatia, Bernat, Xabi Alonso, Rode (Dante 25), Hojbjerg, Robben, Ribery (Schweinsteiger 81), Lewandowski (Shaqiri 84). *Sent off: Benatia 21.*

Dec 10
Bayern Munich 3 (Muller pen 18, Rode 84, Gotze 90)
CSKA Moscow 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 68,000. **Ref:** Benquerenca (Por)
Bayern: Neuer - Rode, Boateng, Dante, Bernat, Hojbjerg, Schweinsteiger, Gaudino (Weiser 73), Gotze, Ribery (Lewandowski 46), Muller (Robben 46).
CSKA: Akinfeev - Mario Fernandes, Ignashevich, V Berezutsky, Nababkin, Wernbloom, Natcho (Tosic 66), Musa (Efremov 90), Eremenko (Milanov 82), Dzagoev, Doumbia.

Dec 10
Roma 0
Manchester City 2 (Nasri 60, Zabaleta 86)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 54,119. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Roma: De Sanctis - Maicon (Florenzi 79), Manolas, Yanga-Mbiwa, Holebas, Nainggolan, Keita, Ljajic (Iturbe 67), Pjanic, Gervinho, Totti (Destro 70).
Man City: Hart - Zabaleta, Demichelis, Mangala, Clichy, Fernandinho, Fernando, Jesus Navas (Silva 67), Milner, Nasri (Kolarov 89), Dzeko (Jovetic 78).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern (Q)	6	5	0	1	16	4	15
Man City (Q)	6	2	2	2	9	8	8
Roma[1]	6	1	2	3	8	14	5
CSKA Moscow	6	1	2	3	6	13	5

World Service

ITALY

Leandro Castan has brain op

Roma's Brazilian defender Leandro Castan underwent neurosurgery to resolve "a congenital vascular alteration in his brain".

The 28-year-old has not played since September, when he was substituted at half-time in the 1-0 win away to Empoli after complaining of acute dizziness. Medical tests later confirmed a "cavernoma", which is a cluster of abnormal blood vessels that puts pressure on the brain.

"Although the cavernoma does not represent a threat to the player's life – indeed, he is currently in peak physical condition – he is at risk of recurrences," said a club statement.

"Therefore, the medical staff, club and player have agreed that he will undergo neurosurgery in order to definitively cure the problem. This will allow him to resume regular competitive sporting activity."

Capped twice by Brazil, Leandro Castan has been a regular in Serie A since joining Roma in 2012.

Surgery...Roma's Leandro Castan had complained of feeling dizzy

Group F

Nov 25
APOEL (Cyp) 0
Barcelona (Spa) 4 (Suarez 27, Messi 38, 58, 87)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 20,626. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
APOEL: Pardo - Mario Sergio, Joao Guilherme, Carlao, Antoniades, Vinicius (Djebbour 74), Nuno Morais, Tiago Gomes, Aloneftis (Efrem 46), Sheridan, Manduca (De Vincenti 63).
Sent off: Joao Guilherme 84.
Barcelona: Ter Stegen - Daniel Alves, Pique, Bartra, Jordi Alba (Adriano 62), Mascherano, Rakitic (Xavi 62), Rafinha, Suarez (Busquets 77), Messi, Pedro. *Sent off: Rafinha 70.*

Nov 25
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 3 (Cavani 33, 83, Ibrahimovic 78)
Ajax (Hol) 1 (Klaassen 67)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 46,130. **Ref:** Jug (Sln)
PSG: Sirigu - Van der Wiel, Marquinhos, David Luiz, Maxwell, Rabiot (Chantome 75), Pastore, Matuidi, Lavezzi (Lucas Moura 68), Cavani, Ibrahimovic (Digne 86).
Ajax: Cillessen - Van Rhijn, Van der Hoorn, Denswil, Boilesen (Viergever 10), Serero (Zimling 69), Klaassen, Andersen, Schone, Kishna, Milik.

Dec 10
Ajax 4 (Schone pen 45+1, 50, Klaassen 53, Milik 74)
APOEL 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 51,796. **Ref:** Velasco Carballo (Spa)
Ajax: Cillessen - Van Rhijn, Veltman, Moisander, Viergever, Serero, Klaassen, Andersen (Riedewald 68), Schone (El Ghazi 75), Kishna, Milik (Zivkovic 85).
APOEL: Pardo - Mario Sergio, Papazoglou, Carlao, Antoniades, Vinicius, Nuno Morais (Artymatas 72), Tiago Gomes, Alexandrou, Efrem (Aloneftis 65), Sheridan (Sotiriou 65).

Dec 10
Barcelona 3 (Messi 19, Neymar 42, Suarez 77)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Ibrahimovic 15)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 82,570. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)
Barcelona: Ter Stegen - Bartra (Adriano 90+1), Pique, Mathieu, Pedro (Rakitic 68), Mascherano, Busquets, Iniesta (Xavi 73), Messi, Suarez, Neymar.
PSG: Sirigu - Van der Wiel, Thiago Silva, David Luiz, Maxwell, Thiago Motta, Verratti (Pastore 63), Matuidi (Lavezzi 75), Lucas Moura, Cavani, Ibrahimovic.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona (Q)	6	5	0	1	15	5	15
PSG (Q)	6	4	1	1	10	7	13
Ajax[1]	6	1	2	3	8	10	5
APOEL	6	0	1	5	1	12	1

Group G

Nov 25
Schalke (Ger) 0
Chelsea (Eng) 5 (Terry 2, Willian 29, Kirchhoff og 44, Drogba 76, Ramires 78)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 54,442. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Schalke: Fahrmann - Uchida, Howedes, Felipe Santana, Aogo, Neustadter, Kirchhoff (Clemens 46), Hoger, Boateng (Meyer 63), Choupo-Moting, Huntelaar.
Chelsea: Courtois - Ivanovic, Terry, Cahill, Azpilicueta, Matic, Fabregas (Schurrle 79), Oscar (Ramires 75), Willian, Hazard, Diego Costa (Drogba 66).

Nov 25
Sporting Lisbon (Por) 3 (Carlos Mane 10, Nani 35, Slimani 65)
Maribor (Sln) 1 (Jefferson og 42)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 32,739. **Ref:** Thomson (Sco)
Sporting: Rui Patricio - Cedric Soares, Mauricio, Paulo Oliveira, Jefferson, William Carvalho, Joao Mario (Andre Martins 82), Adrien Silva, Carlos Mane (Carrillo 66), Nani, Slimani (Montero 75).
Maribor: Handanovic - Stojanovic, Rajcevic, Arghus, Mejac, Mertelj, Filipovic, Vrsic (Ibraimi 46), Sallalich (Bohar 69), Tavares, Zahovic (Mendy 76).

Dec 10
Chelsea 3 (Fabregas pen 8, Schurrle 16, Mikel 56)
Sporting Lisbon 1 (J Silva 50)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 41,089. **Ref:** Moen (Nor)
Chelsea: Cech - Azpilicueta, Zouma, Cahill, Filipe Luis, Mikel, Matic, Schurrle (Ramires 74), Fabregas (Loftus-Cheek 83), Salah (Remy 71), Diego Costa.
Sporting: Rui Patricio - Ricardo Esgaio, Mauricio, Paulo Oliveira, J Silva, William Carvalho (Montero 61), Joao Mario (Andre Martins 70), Adrien Silva, Carrillo, Capel (Carlos Mane 61), Slimani.

Dec 10
Maribor 0
Schalke 1 (Meyer 62)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,516. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Maribor: Handanovic - Stojanovic (Vrsic 76), Rajcevic, Arghus, Viler, Mertelj, Filipovic, Sallalich (Mendy 65), Bohar, Ibraimi (Zahovic 83), Tavares.
Schalke: Fahrmann - Neustadter, Kirchhoff, Howedes, Uchida, Fuchs, Aogo, Hoger (Ayhan 88), Barnetta (Meyer 56), Choupo-Moting, Huntelaar (Friedrich 90+2).

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea (Q)	6	4	2	0	17	3	14
Schalke (Q)	6	2	2	2	9	14	8
Sporting[1]	6	2	1	3	12	12	7
Maribor	6	0	3	3	4	13	3

Group H

Nov 25
BATE Borisov (Bls) 0
Porto (Por) 3 (Herrera 56, Martinez 65, Tello 89)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,147. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)
BATE: Chernik - Olekhnovich, Gayduchik, Tubic, Mladenovic (Aleksievich 72), A Volodko, Yablonski, Gordeychuk, Karnitski (Baga 67), M Volodko, Rodionov (Signevich 75).
Porto: Fabiano - Danilo, Marcano, Martins Indi, Alex Sandro, Casemiro, Herrera, Oliver, Quaresma (Tello 71), Brahimi (Adrian 83), Martinez (Quintero 90).

Nov 25
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 0
Athletic Bilbao (Spa) 1 (San Jose 68)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 33,489. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)
Shakhtar: Pyatov - Srna, Kucher, Rakitskyi, Shevchuk, Fernando (Fred 77), Stepanenko, Douglas Costa (Marlos 68), Alex Teixeira, Taison (Bernard 71), Luiz Adriano.
Athletic: Iraizoz - De Marcos, Etxeita (Gurpegi 32), San Jose, Balenziaga, Iturraspe, Mikel Rico, Susaeta (Aduriz 65), Benat, Muniain (Unai Lopez 88), Viguera.

Dec 10
Athletic Bilbao 2 (San Jose 47, Susaeta 88)
BATE Borisov 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 42,852. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Athletic: Iraizoz - Iraola (Unai Lopez 76), San Jose, Laporte, Balenziaga, Iturraspe, Mikel Rico, Susaeta, De Marcos, Ibai Gomez (Viguera 87), Guillermo (Aduriz 78).
BATE: Soroko - Olekhnovich, Filipenko, Tubic, Khagush, A Volodko (Signevich 60), Yablonski (Baga 77), Gordeychuk, Karnitski, M Volodko, Rodionov (Likhtarovich 83).

Dec 10
Porto 1 (Aboubakar 87)
Shakhtar Donetsk 1 (Stepanenko 51)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 28,010. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)
Porto: Andres Fernandez - Ricardo, Marcano, Maicon, Alex Sandro, Ruben Neves (Martins Indi 41), Quintero (Oliver 69), Evandro, Quaresma, Adrian (Kelvin 53), Aboubakar.
Shakhtar: Pyatov - Ilsinho, Kryvtsov, Rakitskyi, Shevchuk, Fred, Stepanenko (Fernando 86), Douglas Costa (Marlos 66), Bernard (Taison 66), Alex Teixeira, Gladkyi.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto (Q)	6	4	2	0	16	4	14
Shakhtar (Q)	6	2	3	1	15	4	9
Athletic Bilbao[1]	6	2	1	3	5	6	7
BATE Borisov	6	1	0	5	2	24	3

● *Top 2 in each group qualified for 1st knockout round (last 16); [1]3rd-placed teams entered Europa League at 1st knockout round stage (last 32)*

1st knockout round draw

Arsenal v Monaco (Feb 25 & Mar 17)
Basle v Porto (Feb 18 & Mar 10)
Bayer Leverkusen v Atletico Madrid (Feb 25 & Mar 17)
Juventus v Borussia Dortmund (Feb 24 & Mar 18)
Manchester City v Barcelona (Feb 24 & Mar 18)
Paris Saint-Germain v Chelsea (Feb 17 & Mar 11)
Schalke v Real Madrid (Feb 18 & Mar 10)
Shakhtar Donetsk v Bayern Munich (Feb 17 & Mar 11)

EUROPA LEAGUE

Group A

Nov 27: Villarreal (Spa) 2 Monchengladbach (Ger) 2; Zurich (Swi) 3 Apollon (Cyp) 1.
Dec 11: Apollon 0 Villarreal 2; Monchengladbach 3 Zurich 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
M'gladbach (Q)	6	3	3	0	14	4	12
Villarreal (Q)	6	3	2	1	15	7	11
Zurich	6	2	1	3	10	14	7
Apollon	6	1	0	5	4	18	3

Group B

Nov 27: HJK Helsinki (Fin) 2 Copenhagen (Den) 1; Torino (Ita) 0 Club Brugge (Blg) 0.
Dec 11: Club Brugge 2 HJK Helsinki 1; Copenhagen 1 Torino 5.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge (Q)	6	3	3	0	10	2	12
Torino (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	3	11
HJK Helsinki	6	2	0	4	5	11	6
Copenhagen	6	1	1	4	5	13	4

Group C

Nov 27: Asteras (Gre) 2 Besiktas (Tur) 2; Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 1 Partizan Belgrade (Ser) 0.
Dec 11: Besiktas 1 Tottenham Hotspur 0; Partizan Belgrade 0 Asteras 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Besiktas (Q)	6	3	3	0	11	5	12
Tottenham (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	4	11
Asteras	6	1	3	2	7	10	6
Partizan	6	0	2	4	1	9	2

Group D

Nov 27: Astra (Rom) 1 Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0; Celtic (Sco) 1 Salzburg (Aut) 3.
Dec 11: Dinamo Zagreb 4 Celtic 3; Salzburg 5 Astra 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg (Q)	6	5	1	0	21	8	16
Celtic (Q)	6	2	2	2	10	11	8
Dinamo Zagreb	6	2	0	4	12	15	6
Astra	6	1	1	4	6	15	4

Group E

Nov 27: Dynamo Moscow (Rus) 2 Panathinaikos (Gre) 1.
Nov 28: Estoril (Por) 3 PSV Eindhoven (Hol) 3.
Dec 11: Panathinaikos 1 Estoril 1; PSV Eindhoven 0 Dynamo Moscow 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo M'w (Q)	6	6	0	0	9	3	18
PSV (Q)	6	2	2	2	8	8	8
Estoril	6	1	2	3	7	8	5
Panathinaikos	6	0	2	4	6	11	2

Group F

Nov 27: Internazionale (Ita) 2 Dnipro (Ukr) 1; Saint-Etienne (Fra) 1 Qarabag (Aze) 1.
Dec 11: Dnipro 1 Saint-Etienne 0; Qarabag 0 Internazionale 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter (Q)	6	3	3	0	6	2	12
Dnipro (Q)	6	2	1	3	4	5	7
Qarabag	6	1	3	2	3	5	6
Saint-Etienne	6	0	5	1	2	3	5

Group G

Nov 27: Feyenoord (Hol) 2 Sevilla (Spa) 0; Rijeka (Cro) 2 Standard Liege (Blg) 0.
Dec 11: Sevilla 1 Rijeka 0; Standard Liege 0 Feyenoord 3.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Feyenoord (Q)	6	4	0	2	10	6	12
Sevilla (Q)	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
Rijeka	6	2	1	3	7	8	7
Standard Liege	6	1	1	4	4	10	4

Group H

Nov 27: Krasnodar (Rus) 1 Lille (Fra) 1; Wolfsburg (Ger) 0 Everton (Eng) 2.
Dec 11: Everton 0 Krasnodar 1; Lille 0 Wolfsburg 3.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Everton (Q)	6	3	2	1	10	3	11
Wolfsburg (Q)	6	3	1	2	14	10	10
Krasnodar	6	1	3	2	7	12	6
Lille	6	0	4	2	3	9	4

KAZAKHSTAN

Kairat Cup triumph

Kairat Almaty won the Kazakh Cup for the sixth time, beating Aktobe 4-1 in the Final.

"It's a pity we couldn't do better in the league, but I believe our fans are a bit happier now," said Kairat captain Bauyrzhan Islamkhan, whose side finished third in the Kazakh Premier League.

"We have to thank them for their great support. They came to Astana in numbers and helped us win."

NORWAY

Molde do the double

Tor Ole Skullerud led Molde to the double in his first season as coach, adding the Norwegian Cup to the league title with a 2-0 win against Odd in the Final. Cup holders Molde retained the trophy with goals from Fredrik Gulbrandsen and Mohamed Elyounoussi.

"This has been the dream the whole year and finally we have managed it," said Gulbrandsen as Molde became the first side to win the domestic double since Rosenborg in 2003.

Three-times champions Brann, who were league winners as recently as 2007 and in the top flight since 1987, were relegated after losing 4-1 on aggregate in a play-off against Mjondalen. "We have disappointed the whole of Bergen, but I do not intend to step down. I feel I have lots more to give," said coach Rikard Norling.

Double winner...Skullerud

Group I

Nov 27: Slovan Bratislava (Slk) 1 Young Boys (Swi) 3; Sparta Prague (CzR) 0 Napoli (Ita) 0.
Dec 11: Napoli 3 Slovan Bratislava 0; Young Boys 2 Sparta Prague 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP I – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	3	13
Young Boys (Q)	6	4	0	2	13	7	12
Sparta Prague	6	3	1	2	11	6	10
Slovan B'slava	6	0	0	6	1	20	0

Group J

Nov 27: AaB (Den) 1 Steaua Bucharest (Rom) 0; Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 2 Rio Ave (Por) 0.
Dec 11: Rio Ave 2 AaB 0; Steaua Bucharest 0 Dynamo Kiev 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP J – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo K (Q)	6	5	0	1	12	4	15
AaB (Q)	6	3	0	3	5	10	9
Steaua	6	2	1	3	11	9	7
Rio Ave	6	1	1	4	5	10	4

Group K

Nov 27: Dinamo Minsk (Bls) 0 PAOK Salonika (Gre) 2; Guingamp (Fra) 1 Fiorentina (Ita) 2.
Dec 11: Fiorentina 1 Dinamo Minsk 2; PAOK Salonika 1 Guingamp 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP K – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fiorentina (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	4	13
Guingamp (Q)	6	3	1	2	7	6	10
PAOK Salonika	6	2	1	3	10	7	7
Dinamo Minsk	6	1	1	4	3	14	4

Group L

Nov 27: Lokeren (Blg) 1 Legia Warsaw (Pol) 0; Trabzonspor (Tur) 3 Metalist (Ukr) 1.
Dec 11: Legia Warsaw 2 Trabzonspor 0; Metalist 0 Lokeren 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP L – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia (Q)	6	5	0	1	7	2	15
Trabzonspor (Q)	6	3	1	2	8	6	10
Lokeren	6	3	1	2	4	4	10
Metalist	6	0	0	6	3	10	0

● *Top 2 in each group qualified for 1st knockout round (last 32)*

1st knockout round draw

(the 8 3rd-placed teams from the Champions League group stage entered at this stage)
AaB v Club Brugge
Ajax v Legia Warsaw
Anderlecht v Dynamo Moscow
Celtic v Internazionale
Dnipro v Olympiakos
Guingamp v Dynamo Kiev
Liverpool v Besiktas
PSV Eindhoven v Zenit St Petersburg
Roma v Feyenoord
Sevilla v Monchengladbach
Torino v Athletic Bilbao
Tottenham Hotspur v Fiorentina
Trabzonspor v Napoli
Villarreal v Salzburg
Wolfsburg v Sporting Lisbon
Young Boys v Everton
1st legs - Feb 19; 2nd legs - Feb 26

AUSTRIA

Nov 22: Grodig 3 Rapid 1; Austria 4 Admira 0; Ried 2 Altach 1; Wiener Neustadt 2 Wolfsberger 0.
Nov 23: Sturm 1 Salzburg 2.
Nov 29: Ried 1 Austria 1; Rapid 3 Wiener Neustadt 0; Admira 0 Sturm 2; Altach 3 Grodig 1.
Nov 30: Salzburg 2 Wolfsberger 2.
Dec 6: Austria 2 Salzburg 4; Grodig 5 Admira 0; Sturm 3 Ried 1; Wiener Neustadt 2 Altach 0.
Dec 7: Wolfsberger 1 Rapid 1.
Dec 13: Altach 2 Sturm 0; Austria 1 Grodig 0; Ried 6 Wiener Neustadt 0; Admira 2 Wolfsberger 1.
Dec 14: Salzburg 1 Rapid 2.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	19	12	2	5	57	25	38
Wolfsberger	19	9	3	7	28	21	30
Altach	19	8	6	5	27	23	30
Rapid	19	8	5	6	31	26	29
Sturm	19	8	4	7	27	23	28
Austria	19	6	8	5	27	28	26
Grodig	19	6	6	7	28	31	24
Ried	19	6	5	8	26	28	23
Admira	19	4	6	9	17	34	18
W Neustadt	19	4	3	12	20	49	15

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

BELARUS

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular-season record

BELARUS – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BATE (C)	32	20	11	1	68	21	71
Dinamo Minsk	32	18	7	7	44	21	61
Shakhtyor	32	14	8	10	35	28	50
Torpedo	32	13	11	8	38	30	50
Naftan	32	11	10	11	40	43	43
Gomel	32	10	8	14	29	41	38

BELARUS – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Minsk	32	16	4	12	45	36	52
Neman	32	11	9	12	41	36	42
Slutsk	32	11	7	14	26	34	40
Belshina	32	8	8	16	42	56	32
Dinamo Brest	32	7	5	20	29	68	26
Dnepr (R)[1]	32	2	14	16	19	42	20

[1]*Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off*

BELGIUM

Regular season

Nov 22: Charleroi 3 Anderlecht 1; Gent 4 Cercle Brugge 0; Mouscron Peruwelz 2 Lierse 1; Lokeren 0 Westerlo 0; Club Brugge 4 Waasland-Beveren 2.
Nov 23: Oostende 3 Standard 2; Genk 3 Mechelen 0; Kortrijk 3 Zulte Waregem 1.
Nov 28: Zulte Waregem 2 Gent 1.
Nov 29: Westerlo 2 Charleroi 3; Mechelen 0 Oostende 0; Waasland-Beveren 2 Mouscron Peruwelz 1; Cercle Brugge 0 Genk 1.
Nov 30: Anderlecht 2 Club Brugge 2; Standard 0 Kortrijk 2; Lierse 1 Lokeren 1.
Dec 5: Westerlo 1 Waasland-Beveren 2.
Dec 6: Mouscron Peruwelz 4 Anderlecht 2; Oostende 2 Lierse 1; Lokeren 0 Cercle Brugge 0; Kortrijk 3 Mechelen 0.
Dec 7: Club Brugge 2 Zulte Waregem 1; Charleroi 0 Standard 1; Gent 0 Genk 0.
Dec 12: Mechelen 0 Gent 0.
Dec 13: Genk 3 Kortrijk 0; Lierse 3 Westerlo 3; Waasland-Beveren 1 Charleroi 3; Cercle Brugge 2 Mouscron Peruwelz 1.
Dec 14: Standard 1 Club Brugge 3; Anderlecht 3 Oostende 0; Zulte Waregem 1 Lokeren 0.

BELGIUM – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge	19	10	8	1	44	20	38
Anderlecht	19	9	7	3	33	24	34
Genk	19	8	8	3	25	16	32
Kortrijk	19	10	1	8	31	27	31
Gent	19	8	7	4	28	17	31
Lokeren	19	7	8	4	28	20	29
Charleroi	19	8	4	7	28	26	28
Standard	19	8	3	8	30	31	27
Oostende	19	7	4	8	25	28	25
Mouscron P	19	6	5	8	30	31	23
Z Waregem	19	6	4	9	25	31	22
Westerlo	19	5	7	7	31	40	22
Mechelen	19	5	6	8	22	28	21
Waasland-B	19	6	2	11	20	31	20
Cercle Brugge	19	4	5	10	13	28	17
Lierse	19	3	5	11	20	35	14

30-round regular season (15x2); top 6 will form championship group, 7th to 14th will enter Europa League-place play-offs, 15th & 16th (bottom 2) will enter relegation play-off series (the winners of which will enter rel/prom play-offs, the losers will go down)

CZECH REPUBLIC

Nov 21: Mlada Boleslav 2 Slovacko 0.
Nov 22: Teplice 1 Dukla 0; Liberec 2 Jihlava 2; Brno 1 Pribram 0; Sparta 4 Ceske Budejovice 0; Ostrava 1 Jablonec 2.
Nov 23: Plzen 2 Bohemians 1905 1; Slavia 1 Hradec Kralove 1.
Nov 28: Ceske Budejovice 2 Teplice 0; Ostrava 0 Slavia 0.
Nov 29: Pribram 1 Liberec 0; Hradec Kralove 2 Brno 1; Dukla 0 Mlada Boleslav 2; Bohemians 1905 1 Slovacko 2.
Nov 30: Jihlava 0 Sparta 2; Jablonec 1 Plzen 2.

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plzen	16	12	2	2	33	12	38
Sparta	16	12	1	3	26	7	37
Jablonec	16	10	3	3	30	14	33
M Boleslav	16	8	2	6	21	12	26
Ostrava	16	6	4	6	12	20	22
Teplice	16	5	6	5	24	20	21
Slovacko	16	6	3	7	25	24	21
Slavia	16	5	5	6	21	22	20
Dukla	16	5	5	6	18	24	20
Pribram	16	5	4	7	19	24	19
Jihlava	16	5	3	8	15	22	18
C Budejovice	16	4	6	6	15	30	18
Boh'ians 1905	16	5	2	9	20	26	17
Brno	16	4	4	8	17	24	16
Liberec	16	2	9	5	19	18	15
H Kralove	16	2	5	9	12	28	11

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

DENMARK

Nov 21: Vestsjaelland 0 Randers 1.
Nov 22: Esbjerg 4 Hobro 2; Copenhagen 1 Silkeborg 0.
Nov 23: OB 1 Nordsjaelland 0; Brondby 1 SonderjyskE 0; Midtjylland 2 AaB 0.
Nov 28: SonderjyskE 0 Esbjerg 0.
Nov 29: Silkeborg 0 OB 1.
Nov 30: Hobro 0 Randers 1; Nordsjaelland 2 Brondby 0; AaB 0 Copenhagen 1.
Dec 1: Midtjylland 2 Vestsjaelland 1.
Dec 5: Randers 0 SonderjyskE 0.
Dec 6: OB 1 AaB 1.
Dec 7: Vestsjaelland 1 Hobro 1; Brondby 1 Silkeborg 0; Copenhagen 3 Midtjylland 0.
Dec 8: Esbjerg 0 Nordsjaelland 0.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Midtjylland	17	13	1	3	34	18	40
Copenhagen	17	9	5	3	19	12	32
Randers	17	9	4	4	17	11	31
Brondby	17	8	3	6	21	17	27
Nordsjaelland	17	7	4	6	19	20	25
AaB	17	5	7	5	16	14	22
Hobro	17	5	6	6	24	25	21
Esbjerg	17	4	8	5	23	19	20
SonderjyskE	17	3	11	3	16	17	20
OB	17	5	4	8	19	23	19
Vestsjaelland	17	4	3	10	17	31	15
Silkeborg	17	0	4	13	8	26	4

33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ENGLAND

Saturday, November 22

Arsenal 1 (Giroud 90+5)
Manchester United 2 (Gibbs og 56, Rooney 85)
Att: 60,074

Chelsea 2 (Diego Costa 11, Hazard 25)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 41,600

Everton 2 (Lukaku 26, Osman 73)
West Ham 1 (Zarate 56) Att: 39,182

Leicester 0
Sunderland 0 Att: 31,825

Manchester City 2 (Jovetic 19, Toure 62)
Swansea 1 (Bony 9) Att: 45,448

Newcastle 1 (Sissoko 78)
Queens Park Rangers 0 Att: 51,915

Stoke 1 (Walters 32)
Burnley 2 (Ings 12, 13) Att: 27,018

Sunday, November 23

Crystal Palace 3 (Gayle 17, Ledley 78, Jedinak 81)
Liverpool 1 (Lambert 2) Att: 24,862

Hull 1 (Livermore 8)
Tottenham 2 (Kane 61, Eriksen 90) Att: 23,561

Monday, November 24

Aston Villa 1 (Agbonlahor 29)
Southampton 1 (Clyne 81) Att: 25,311

Saturday, November 29

Burnley 1 (Ings pen 87)
Aston Villa 1 (Cole 38) Att: 19,910

Liverpool 1 (Johnson 85)
Stoke 0 Att: 44,735

Manchester United 3 (Smalling 16, Rooney 42, Van Persie 66)
Hull 0 Att: 75,345

Queens Park Rangers 3 (Morgan og 37, Fer 45, Austin 73)
Leicester 2 (Cambiasso 4, Schlupp 67) Att: 18,054

Sunderland 0
Chelsea 0 Att: 45,232

Swansea 1 (Bony 15)
Crystal Palace 1 (Jedinak pen 25) Att: 20,240

West Bromwich 0
Arsenal 1 (Welbeck 60) Att: 24,228

West Ham 1 (Cresswell 56)
Newcastle 0 Att: 34,977

World Service

SERBIA

Coach sees red

Partizan Belgrade coach Marko Nikolic was hit by a firecracker and later sent off for dissent during his side's 1-1 draw at Novi Pazar.

"I could have had a part of my body blown off and was even sent off for a simple protest," said Nikolic.

With away fans banned amid fears of crowd trouble, Nikolic was struck by a firecracker shortly after Danko Lazovic had put the visitors in front in the first half. Nikolic was dismissed after protesting against a disallowed goal that would have made it 2-0.

The home side equalised when Partizan defender Branko Ilic turned a cross past his own goalkeeper.

Under attack...Nikolic

UKRAINE

Crimea clubs banned

UEFA has ruled that teams in the annexed Crimea region of the Ukraine can no longer be able to compete in Russian competitions.

Statutes bar clubs from switching countries without agreement from all parties, but Russia insists that three clubs from the region – TSK Simferopol, SKChF Sevastopol and Zhemchuzhina Yalta – are all new entities and unconnected with the old teams that played in the Ukrainian league.

Russia claims that the two Crimea teams who used to play in the Ukraine top flight had been disbanded. Eight months ago, the three "new" clubs were admitted

Sunday, November 30
Southampton 0
Manchester City 3 (Toure 51, Lampard 80, Clichy 88) Att: 30,919

Tottenham 2 (Eriksen 21, Soldado 45+1)
Everton 1 (Mirallas 15) Att: 35,901

Tuesday, December 2
Burnley 1 (Boyd 34)
Newcastle 1 (Cisse 48) Att: 18,791

Crystal Palace 0
Aston Villa 1 (Benteke 32) Att: 23,935

Leicester 1 (Mignolet og 22)
Liverpool 3 (Lallana 26, Gerrard 54, Henderson 83) Att: 32,000

Manchester United 2 (Fellaini 21, Mata 59)
Stoke 1 (N'Zonzi 39) Att: 75,388

Swansea 2 (Ki 78, Routledge 83)
Queens Park Rangers 0 Att: 20,145

West Bromwich 1 (Dawson 10)
West Ham 2 (Nolan 35, Tomkins 45+3) Att: 23,975

Wednesday, December 3
Arsenal 1 (Sanchez 89)
Southampton 0 Att: 60,025

Chelsea 3 (Hazard 19, Drogba 22, Remy 73)
Tottenham 0 Att: 41,518

Everton 1 (Lukaku 34)
Hull 1 (Aluko 59) Att: 34,645

Sunderland 1 (Wickham 19)
Manchester City 4 (Aguero 21, 71, Jovetic 39, Zabaleta 55) Att: 41,152

Saturday, December 6
Hull 0
West Bromwich 0 Att: 23,279

Liverpool 0
Sunderland 0 Att: 44,716

Manchester City 1 (Toure pen 24)
Everton 0 Att: 45,603

Newcastle 2 (Cisse 57, 78)
Chelsea 1 (Drogba 83) Att: 52,019

Queens Park Rangers 2 (Fer 51, Austin 74)
Burnley 0 Att: 17,785

Stoke 3 (Crouch 1, Bojan 35, Walters 45)
Arsenal 2 (Cazorla pen 68, Ramsey 70) Att: 27,367

Tottenham 0
Crystal Palace 0 Att: 35,860

Sunday, December 7
Aston Villa 2 (Clark 17, Hutton 71)
Leicester 1 (Ulloa 13) Att: 27,692

West Ham 3 (Carroll 41, 66, Sakho 87)
Swansea 1 (Bony 19) Att: 34,125

Monday, December 8
Southampton 1 (Pelle 31)
Manchester United 2 (Van Persie 12, 71) Att: 31,420

Saturday, December 13
Arsenal 4 (Giroud 15, 58, Cazorla 54, pen 88)
Newcastle 1 (Perez 63) Att: 59,949

Burnley 1 (Barnes 73)
Southampton 0 Att: 17,287

Chelsea 2 (Hazard 7, Diego Costa 68)
Hull 0 Att: 41,626

Crystal Palace 1 (McArthur 11)
Stoke 1 (Crouch 13) Att: 23,038

Leicester 0
Manchester City 1 (Lampard 40) Att: 31,643

Sunderland 1 (Jordi Gomez pen 22)
West Ham 1 (Downing 29) Att: 41,694

West Bromwich 1 (Gardner 72)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 24,684

Sunday, December 14
Manchester United 3 (Rooney 12, Mata 40, Van Persie 71)
Liverpool 0 Att: 75,331

Swansea 1 (Bony 48)
Tottenham 2 (Kane 4, Eriksen 89) Att: 20,650

Monday, December 15
Everton 3 (Barkley 33, Mirallas 43, Naismith 53)
Queens Park Rangers 1 (Zamora 80) Att: 34,035

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea	16	12	3	1	36	13	39
Man City	16	11	3	2	33	14	36
Man United	16	9	4	3	29	17	31
West Ham	16	8	4	4	27	19	28
Southampton	16	8	2	6	25	13	26
Arsenal	16	7	5	4	28	19	26
Tottenham	16	7	3	6	20	22	24
Newcastle	16	6	5	5	18	22	23
Swansea	16	6	4	6	21	19	22
Everton	16	5	6	5	27	24	21
Liverpool	16	6	3	7	19	22	21
Stoke	16	5	4	7	18	21	19
Aston Villa	16	5	4	7	10	20	19
West Brom	16	4	5	7	15	20	17
Sunderland	16	2	10	4	14	24	16
Crystal Palace	16	3	6	7	19	24	15
Burnley	16	3	6	7	11	24	15
QPR	16	4	2	10	17	30	14
Hull	16	2	7	7	15	23	13
Leicester	16	2	4	10	15	27	10

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorers
14 Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)
12 Diego Costa (Chelsea)
9 Alexis Sanchez (Arsenal)
8 Charlie Austin (Queens Park Rangers)
Wilfried Bony (Swansea)

ESTONIA

● *Lokomotiv relegated after losing rel/prom play-off*

FRANCE

Friday, November 21
Metz 2 (Maiga pen 49, pen 53)
Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Pastore 9, Bussmann og 16, Lavezzi 84) Att: 25,012

Saturday, November 22
Bastia 0
Lyon 0 Att: 12,349

Guingamp 0
Rennes 1 (Ntep 37) Att: 16,501

Lorient 1 (Guerreiro 22)
Lens 0 Att: 13,204

Monaco 2 (Imorou og 5, Joao Moutinho 75)
Caen 2 (Koita 51, Kondogbia og 59) Att: 7,508

Nice 0
Reims 0 Att: 15,207

Sunday, November 23
Marseille 3 (Lemina 60, Gignac 85, Batshuayi 89)
Bordeaux 1 (Toure 55) Att: 54,323

Montpellier 2 (Mounier 37, Camara 87)
Toulouse 0 Att: 9,270

Nantes 0
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 32,324

Friday, November 28
Marseille 2 (Thauvin 24, Fanni 39)
Nantes 0 Att: 54,103

Saturday, November 29
Caen 1 (Duhamel 40)
Montpellier 1 (Hilton 17) Att: 14,976

Lens 2 (El Jadeyaoui 65, Bourigeaud 79)
Metz 0 Att: 8,922

Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Ibrahimovic pen 15)
Nice 0 Att: 45,542

Reims 2 (Ngog 10, Moukandjo 85)
Bastia 1 (Modesto 41) Att: 13,504

Rennes 2 (Abdennour og 10, Toivonen 19)
Monaco 0 Att: 17,213

Toulouse 2 (Doumbia 23, Pesic 70)
Lorient 3 (Guerreiro 55, Jeannot 57, Ayew pen 60) Att: 20,550

Sunday, November 30
Bordeaux 1 (Diabate 62)
Lille 0 Att: 19,361

Evian TG 2 (Wass 59, Nielsen 81)
Guingamp 0 Att: 10,665

Saint-Etienne 3 (Sall 18, Van Wolfswinkel 40, Cohade 68)
Lyon 0 Att: 36,004

Tuesday, December 2
Lorient 1 (Ayew pen 37)
Marseille 1 (Payet 32) Att: 16,011

Monaco 2 (Berbatov pen 64, Ferreira Carrasco 90+3)
Lens 0 Att: 5,686

Nantes 1 (Veretout pen 64)
Toulouse 2 (Sylla 24, Braithwaite 85) Att: 19,669

Wednesday, December 3
Bastia 1 (Abdallah og 35)
Evian TG 2 (Wass 65, Nsikulu 83) Att: 10,902

Guingamp 5 (Mandanne 4, 62, Giresse 21, Beauvue pen 61, 78)
Caen 1 (Yahia 17) Att: 13,423

Lille 1 (Sirigu og 42)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Cavani 29) Att: 45,771

Metz 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 17,866

Montpellier 0
Saint-Etienne 2 (Pogba 23, Baysse 43) Att: 10,425

Nice 1 (Cvitanich 83)
Rennes 2 (Ntep 12, Konradsen 49) Att: 15,033

Thursday, December 4
Lyon 2 (Tolisso 6, Placide og 90+1)
Reims 1 (Moukandjo 36) Att: 32,513

Friday, December 5
Toulouse 0
Monaco 2 (Berbatov 45, pen 77) Att: 9,947

Saturday, December 6
Bordeaux 3 (Khazri 43, Diabate 64, 66)
Lorient 2 (Jeannot 31, Le Goff 51) Att: 15,724

Caen 2 (Duhamel pen 39, Nangis 45)
Nice 3 (Amavi 32, Bautheac pen 64, Plea 74) Att: 13,487

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Ibrahimovic 34, 48)
Nantes 1 (Bedoya 8) Att: 46,161

Rennes 0
Montpellier 4 (Martin 23, Sanson 55, Barrios 60, Mounier 90+2) Att: 16,123

Saint-Etienne 1 (Van Wolfswinkel 58)
Bastia 0 Att: 28,686

Sunday, December 7
Evian TG 2 (Barbosa 28, 64)
Lyon 3 (Benzia 62, Lacazette 81, pen 90+4) Att: 13,064

Lens 1 (Coulibaly 90+2)
Lille 1 (Gueye 48) Att: 40,112

Marseille 3 (Gignac 43, Ayew 59, Payet 90+2)
Metz 1 (Malouda 46) Att: 45,537

Reims 2 (Charbonnier 6, Oniangue 68)
Guingamp 3 (Jacobsen 33, Mandanne 47, Beauvue 79) Att: 11,255

Friday, December 12
Lyon 3 (Lacazette pen 7, 57, Benzia 62)
Caen 0 Att: 32,962

Saturday, December 13
Bastia 2 (Boudebouz 45+1, Cahuzac 81)
Rennes 0 Att: 11,121

Lorient 3 (Ayew 13, Guerreiro 37, Jeannot 45+1)
Metz 1 (Ngbakoto 46) Att: 11,507

Montpellier 3 (Sanson 1, Barrios 16, Mounier 63)
Lens 3 (Valdivia 18, Guillaume 35, Touzghar 80) Att: 9,784

Nantes 2 (Veretout 23, Jug og 66)
Bordeaux 1 (Hansen og 28) Att: 23,751

Reims 3 (Diego 14, 80, Mandi 78)
Evian TG 2 (Wass 57, Cambon 69) Att: 11,011

Sunday, December 14
Guingamp 1 (Pied 11)
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 17,636

Lille 3 (Sidibe 7, Ryan Mendes 50, Roux 77)
Toulouse 0 Att: 37,938

to the third tier of the Russian league, which is currently on a mid-winter break.

UEFA vice-president Grigoriy Surkis, who is honorary president of the Ukrainian Football Federation, said "the verdict shows that UEFA cares about the development of football across the entire European continent".

ARGENTINA

Captain killed after game

Franco Nieto, the captain of third-tier side Tiro Federal was beaten to death by an opponent and supporters of a rival team after a league game against Chacarita. The match was abandoned 10 minutes before full-time following a brawl which saw eight players sent off.

CHILE

Colo Colo slip costs title

Universidad Chile won the apertura title after league leaders Colo Colo lost 2-0 at Santiago Wanderers on the last day of the season.

Universidad Chile took full advantage and beat Union La Calera 1-0 with an 88th-minute penalty from Gustavo Canales.

PARAGUAY

Libertad dominate

Libertad clinched the apertura-clausura double for the first time since the format was introduced in 2008 with a 1-0 win over Nacional of Asuncion on the final day of the season.

3 de Febrero and 12 de Octubre were relegated to the second tier.

Champions...Libertad

Monaco 1 (Bernardo Silva 67)
Marseille 0 Att: 12,648

Nice 0
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 18,493

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Marseille	18	12	2	4	36	16	38
PSG	18	10	7	1	32	13	37
Lyon	18	11	3	4	35	17	36
Saint-Etienne	18	9	6	3	19	12	33
Bordeaux	18	9	4	5	26	22	31
Monaco	18	8	5	5	22	18	29
Rennes	18	8	4	6	20	21	28
Nantes	18	7	6	5	17	16	27
Montpellier	18	7	4	7	21	19	25
Reims	18	7	4	7	22	29	25
Nice	18	6	4	8	21	24	22
Lille	17	5	6	6	14	15	21
Guingamp	18	7	0	11	19	30	21
Lorient	18	6	2	10	20	24	20
Toulouse	18	6	2	10	21	28	20
Evian TG	17	6	1	10	20	29	19
Metz	18	5	4	9	17	26	19
Bastia	18	4	5	9	15	22	17
Lens	18	4	4	10	18	24	16
Caen	18	3	5	10	21	31	14

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorers

15 Alexandre Lacazette (Lyon)
12 Andre-Pierre Gignac (Marseille)
8 Cheick Diabate (Bordeaux)
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Paris Saint-Germain)
Daniel Wass (Evian TG)

GERMANY

Saturday, November 22

Bayern Munich 4 (Gotze 23, Lewandowski 40, Robben 82, Rode 87)
Hoffenheim 0 Att: 71,000

Cologne 1 (Ujah 58)
Hertha Berlin 2 (Beerens 28, N'Djeng 86) Att: 49,200

Hanover 1 (Gulselam 60)
Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Kiessling 46, Son 58, Bellarabi 72) Att: 40,800

Mainz 2 (Diaz 27, Bell 88)
Freiburg 2 (Schmid 30, Mehmedi 58) Att: 28,157

Monchengladbach 1 (Nordtveit 6)
Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Stendera 54, Meier 57, Inui 73) Att: 54,010

Paderborn 2 (Rupp 60, Saglik 81)
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Aubameyang 12, Reus 45+1) Att: 15,000

Schalke 3 (Choupo-Moting 10, 22, Fuchs 25)
Wolfsburg 2 (Olic 37, Bendtner 74) Att: 60,989

Sunday, November 23

Hamburg 2 (Rudnevs 84, Wolf og 90+3)
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 57,000

Stuttgart 0
Augsburg 1 (Verhaegh pen 72) Att: 48,200

Friday, November 28

Freiburg 1 (Darida 42)
Stuttgart 4 (Harnik 31, 76, Gruezo 52, Werner 68) Att: 24,000

Saturday, November 29

Augsburg 3 (Altintop 50, Bobadilla 62, Verhaegh pen 70)
Hamburg 1 (Van der Vaart 45+1) Att: 30,321

Bayer Leverkusen 5 (Bellarabi 26, 90+1, Calhanoglu 61, Drmic 79, 88)
Cologne 1 (Lehmann pen 4) Att: 30,210

Hertha Berlin 0
Bayern Munich 1 (Robben 27) Att: 76,197

Hoffenheim 4 (Schwegler 19, Volland 37, Polanski 59, Sule 63)
Hanover 3 (Stindl 43, 86, Joselu 52) Att: 22,716

Schalke 4 (Huntelaar 9, 25, 61, Barnetta 54)
Mainz 1 (Okazaki 44) Att: 60,904

Werder Bremen 4 (Junuzovic 10, Selke 48, Bartels 50, Aycicek 80)
Paderborn 0 Att: 41,800

Sunday, November 30

Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Meier 5, Seferovic 78)
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 51,500

Wolfsburg 1 (Knoche 12)
Monchengladbach 0 Att: 30,000

Friday, December 5

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Gundogan 17)
Hoffenheim 0 Att: 80,000

Saturday, December 6

Bayern Munich 1 (Ribery 51)
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 71,000

Cologne 1 (Ujah 13)
Augsburg 2 (Djurdjic 53, Esswein 90) Att: 48,500

Hanover 1 (Joselu 45+1)
Wolfsburg 3 (De Bruyne 4, Dost 69, Arnold 85) Att: 41,400

Monchengladbach 3 (Jantschke 9, Raffael 53, Hazard 83)
Hertha Berlin 2 (Schieber 45, Kalou pen 90+2) Att: 50,190

Paderborn 1 (Kachunga 89)
Freiburg 1 (Darida pen 18) Att: 14,738

Stuttgart 0
Schalke 4 (Choupo-Moting 1, 21, 61, Meyer 10) Att: 44,700

Sunday, December 7

Eintracht Frankfurt 5 (Meier 34, 68, Seferovic 52, Aigner 76, Stendera 80)
Werder Bremen 2 (Gebre Selassie 45, Caldirola 79) Att: 46,800

Hamburg 2 (Cleber 32, Van der Vaart pen 54)
Mainz 1 (Okazaki 89) Att: 45,968

Friday, December 12

Hoffenheim 3 (Volland 43, Szalai 66, Roberto Firmino 87)
Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Aigner 58, Seferovic 77) Att: 28,331

Saturday, December 13

Augsburg 0
Bayern Munich 4 (Benatia 58, Robben 60, 71, Lewandowski 68) Att: 30,660

Freiburg 0
Hamburg 0 Att: 24,000

Hertha Berlin 1 (Schieber 40)
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 75,254

Mainz 1 (Geis 36)
Stuttgart 1 (Kostic 72) Att: 29,279

Schalke 1 (Sane 85)
Cologne 2 (Ujah 47, Lehmann pen 67) Att: 61,516

Werder Bremen 3 (Junuzovic 36, Lorenzen 55, Selke 88)
Hanover 3 (Stindl 12, Joselu 62, Kiyotake 64) Att: 40,932

Sunday, December 14

Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Calhanoglu 18)
Monchengladbach 1 (Brouwers 40) Att: 30,210

Wolfsburg 1 (Rafa og 17)
Paderborn 1 (Meha pen 51) Att: 26,044

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern	15	12	3	0	37	3	39
Wolfsburg	15	9	3	3	29	14	30
Leverkusen	15	6	6	3	26	19	24
M'gladbach	15	6	6	3	20	13	24
Augsburg	15	8	0	7	20	18	24
Schalke	15	7	2	6	26	20	23
Hoffenheim	15	6	5	4	24	24	23
Frankfurt	15	6	3	6	29	29	21
Hanover	15	6	2	7	17	24	20
Paderborn	15	4	6	5	20	24	18
Cologne	15	5	3	7	16	21	18
Mainz	15	3	8	4	18	21	17
Hertha	15	5	2	8	20	26	17
Hamburg	15	4	4	7	9	18	16
Freiburg	15	2	8	5	15	21	14
Dortmund	15	4	2	9	15	22	14
Werder	15	3	5	7	23	34	14
Stuttgart	15	3	4	8	19	32	13

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

Leading goalscorers

10 Alexander Meier (Eintracht Frankfurt)
8 Eric Choupo-Moting (Schalke)
Shinji Okazaki (Mainz)
Arjen Robben (Bayern Munich)

GREECE

Nov 29: Kalloni 0 Platanias 0; Levadiakos 0 Panetolikos 0; Atromitos 2 Xanthi 0.
Nov 30: Kerkyra 0 Olympiakos 4; Ergotelis 1 Asteras 4; Panionios 2 Niki 1; PAOK 3 Panthrakikos 2; Giannina 3 OFI 0; Panathinaikos 2 Veria 1.
Dec 3: Panthrakikos 1 Platanias 0; Atromitos 0 Veria 0; Giannina 0 Levadiakos 4; Kerkyra 1 Panionios 0; Xanthi 2 Kalloni 1; Olympiakos 1 PAOK 2.
Dec 4: Panetolikos 0 Panathinaikos 1; Niki 0 Asteras 2; OFI 1 Ergotelis 0.
Dec 6: Veria 2 Platanias 0; Kerkyra 1 Atromitos 1; Olympiakos 2 Giannina 2.
Dec 7: Xanthi 4 PAOK 2; Niki 2 Kalloni 0; Panetolikos 2 Panionios 1; OFI 0 Levadiakos 2; Asteras 1 Panathinaikos 1.
Dec 8: Panthrakikos 0 Ergotelis 0.
Dec 13: Platanias 3 Niki 1; Kalloni 0 Panetolikos 0; Levadiakos 1 Olympiakos 2.
Dec 14: Panionios 2 OFI 0; Asteras 2 Veria 0; Ergotelis 0 Xanthi 2; PAOK 2 Kerkyra 1; Giannina 1 Atromitos 0; Panathinaikos 4 Panthrakikos 0.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PAOK	13	10	1	2	31	13	31
Olympiakos	13	8	3	2	28	11	27
Panathinaikos	13	8	2	3	20	11	26
Asteras	13	7	3	3	22	15	24
Veria	13	6	3	4	18	19	21
Xanthi	13	6	3	4	21	18	21
Giannina	13	5	5	3	17	14	20
Kalloni	13	5	5	3	10	6	20
Atromitos	13	5	4	4	12	11	19
Panetolikos	13	4	6	3	15	11	18
Platanias	13	4	3	6	11	14	15
Kerkyra	13	4	3	6	13	17	15
Levadiakos	13	3	5	5	14	13	14
Panionios	13	4	2	7	13	16	14
OFI	13	4	1	8	8	21	13
Panthrakikos	13	2	4	7	9	22	10
Ergotelis	13	1	4	8	12	24	7
Niki	13	2	1	10	7	25	7

34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

HOLLAND

Nov 22: AZ 1 Vitesse 0; Go Ahead 2 NAC 0; Feyen'd 2 Dordrecht 0; Willem II 1 Excelsior 1; Ajax 4 H'veen 1.
Nov 23: Groningen 1 PSV 1; Zwolle 1 Twente 2; Heracles 3 Den Haag 1; Utrecht 1 Cambuur 3.
Nov 28: Dordrecht 0 Willem II 4.
Nov 29: Heerenveen 0 Heracles 1; NAC 1 Utrecht 5: Vitesse 2 Go Ahead Eagles 2; Cambuur 0 AZ 2.
Nov 30: Den Haag 1 Ajax 1; Excelsior 0 Zwolle 5; Twente 1 Groningen 2.
Dec 6: AZ 2 Go Ahead 0; Excelsior 2 Feyenoord 5; Cambuur 0 NAC 1; Dordrecht 1 PSV 3; Ajax 5 Willem II 0.
Dec 7: Zwolle 3 Den Haag 1; Utrecht 2 Heracles 4; Groningen 1 Heerenveen 1; Vitesse 2 Twente 2.
Dec 12: Heracles 1 Dordrecht 1.
Dec 13: NAC 0 Heerenveen 2; Den Haag 2 Excelsior 2; Willem II 0 Zwolle 1; Go Ahead Eagles 1 Cambuur 2.
Dec 14: Ajax 3 Utrecht 1; PSV 2 Twente 0; Groningen 1 Vitesse 1; Feyenoord 2 AZ 2.

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	15	12	1	2	39	11	37
Ajax	16	11	3	2	41	17	36
Zwolle	16	9	2	5	30	19	29
Feyenoord	15	8	4	3	26	11	28
AZ	16	8	4	4	26	22	28
Twente	16	6	7	3	28	19	25
Cambuur	16	6	5	5	25	24	23
Groningen	16	6	5	5	18	23	23
Heerenveen	16	5	6	5	21	21	21
Willem II	16	6	2	8	23	26	20
Utrecht	16	6	2	8	27	33	20
Vitesse	16	4	7	5	32	27	19
Excelsior	16	3	8	5	23	34	17
Heracles	16	5	1	10	27	33	16
Go Ahead	16	4	4	8	22	31	16
Den Haag	16	3	6	7	22	29	15
NAC	16	3	4	9	16	36	13
Dordrecht	16	1	3	12	11	41	6

34-round season (17x2); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

ITALY

Saturday, November 22

Atalanta 1 (Moralez 1)
Roma 2 (Ljajic 23, Nainggolan 42) Att: 17,286

Lazio 0
Juventus 3 (Pogba 25, 64, Tevez 55) Att: 55,000

Sunday, November 23

Cesena 1 (Lucchini 60)
Sampdoria 1 (Nica og 77) Att: 16,184

World Service

PERU

Play-off game needed

Sporting Cristal beat Alianza Lima 1-0, with a goal from Sergio Blanco, in a play-off after the pair finished the clausura level on points.

Sporting's 1-1 draw at Los Caimanes on the last day of the regular season allowed Alianza Lima to draw level with a 3-2 win at fourth-placed Melgar 3-2.

Deportivo Municipal, who have been national champions four times, return to the top flight after an absence of seven years.

Sport Aguila's Joao Contreras suffered burns to his legs after being struck by lightening during his side's Peruvian Cup semi-final at home to Union Fuerza Mineira.

Apertura victory...Nacional

URUGUAY

Nacional take title

Nacional won the apertura title with two games to spare, beating Cerro 1-0.

VENEZUELA

Maiden championship

Trujillanos won the Primera title for the first time in their history – despite their final game of the season at Deportivo Petare being abandoned after fans invaded the pitch.

Trujillanos, who led 2-0 when the game was called off in the 54th minute, were awarded a 3-0 victory.

Eleven days earlier they were beaten on penalties by Deportivo La Guaira – who were league runners-up – in the Venezuela Cup Final.

Milan 1 (Menez 23)
Internazionale 1 (Obi 61) Att: 79,173

Napoli 3 (Higuain 11, Inler 30, De Guzman 62)
Cagliari 3 (Ibarbo 38, Farias 47, 68) Att: 45,413

Parma 0
Empoli 2 (Vecino 45+1, Tavano 56) Att: 10,625

Torino 0
Sassuolo 1 (Floro Flores 87) Att: 15,528

Udinese 1 (Di Natale 45+1)
Chievo 1 (Radovanovic 74) Att: 8,544

Verona 1 (Lopez 39)
Fiorentina 2 (Rodriguez 16, Cuadrado 62)
Att: 21,553

Monday, November 24

Genoa 1 (Antonelli 30)
Palermo 1 (Dybala 7) Att: 18,588

Saturday, November 29

Chievo 0
Lazio 0 Att: 6,000

Sassuolo 2 (Sansone 50, Taider 78)
Verona 1 (Moras 7) Att: 12,234

Sunday, November 30

Cagliari 0
Fiorentina 4 (Fernandez 17, 56, Gomez 70, Cuadrado 75) Att: 11,000

Cesena 0
Genoa 3 (Matri 5, Antonelli 7, Volta og 43)
Att: 14,650

Empoli 0
Atalanta 0 Att: 6,938

Juventus 2 (Vidal pen 15, Pirlo 90+3)
Torino 1 (Peres 22) Att: 38,899

Milan 2 (Menez pen 65, 75)
Udinese 0 Att: 36,170

Palermo 2 (Dybala 37, Barreto 73)
Parma 1 (Palladino 41) Att: 14,444

Roma 4 (Gervinho 21, Holebas 47, Pjanic 60, 90+2)
Internazionale 2 (Ranocchia 36, Osvaldo 57)
Att: 41,701

Monday, December 1

Sampdoria 1 (Eder 57)
Napoli 1 (Zapata 90+2) Att: 21,033

Friday, December 5

Fiorentina 0
Juventus 0 Att: 38,000

Saturday, December 6

Roma 2 (Ljajic pen 78, 90+3)
Sassuolo 2 (Zaza 16, 18) Att: 38,787

Torino 2 (Martinez 35, Glik 63)
Palermo 2 (Rigoni 16, Dybala 44) Att: 13,974

Sunday, December 7

Atalanta 3 (Benalouane 45+1, Stendardo 50, Moralez 52)
Cesena 2 (Defrel 31, 43) Att: 12,495

Genoa 1 (Antonelli 32)
Milan 0 Att: 21,319

Internazionale 1 (Icardi 44)
Udinese 2 (Bruno Fernandes 60, Thereau 71)
Att: 34,912

Napoli 2 (Zapata 67, De Guzman 72)
Empoli 2 (Verdi 19, Rugani 53) Att: 30,128

Parma 1 (Palladino 45)
Lazio 2 (Mauri 45+3, Felipe Anderson 59) Att: 10,778

Monday, December 8

Cagliari 0
Chievo 2 (Meggiorini 4, Paloschi 9) Att: 12,000

Verona 1 (Toni 37)
Sampdoria 3 (Eder pen 28, Okaka 57, Gabbiadini 62) Att: 18,390

Saturday, December 13

Lazio 3 (Mauri 51, 71, Lulic 81)
Atalanta 0 Att: 24,477

Palermo 2 (Rigoni 3, Belotti 90+3)
Sassuolo 1 (Pavoletti 85) Att: 21,086

Sunday, December 14

Cesena 1 (Savic og 60)
Fiorentina 4 (Borja Valero 44, Savic 47, Rodriguez 79, El Hamdaoui 90+3) Att: 16,275

Genoa 0
Roma 1 (Nainggolan 40) Att: 20,055

Juventus 1 (Evra 12)
Sampdoria 1 (Gabbiadini 51) Att: 39,089

Milan 2 (Menez 6, Bonaventura 52)
Napoli 0 Att: 35,867

Parma 0
Cagliari 0 Att: 10,646

Udinese 1 (Di Natale 31)
Verona 2 (Toni 45+1, Christodoulopoulos 46)
Att: 8,247

Monday, December 15

Chievo 0
Internazionale 2 (Kovacic 19, Ranocchia 55)
Att: 10,000

Empoli 0
Torino 0 Att: 7,796

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	15	11	3	1	31	6	36
Roma	15	11	2	2	28	11	35
Lazio	15	8	2	5	26	17	26
Sampdoria	15	6	8	1	20	12	26
Genoa	15	7	5	3	20	13	26
Milan	15	6	6	3	25	18	24
Napoli	15	6	6	3	26	20	24
Fiorentina	15	6	5	4	20	12	23
Udinese	15	6	3	6	18	20	21
Palermo	15	5	6	4	19	23	21
Internazionale	15	5	5	5	23	21	20
Sassuolo	15	4	7	4	16	20	19
Verona	15	4	5	6	18	26	17
Empoli	15	3	7	5	16	21	16
Torino	15	3	5	7	10	17	14
Atalanta	15	3	5	7	8	18	14
Chievo	15	3	4	8	11	19	13
Cagliari	15	2	6	7	20	26	12
Cesena	15	1	5	9	12	29	8
Parma[1]	15	2	1	12	16	34	6

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated
[1]1pt deducted for failing to pay taxes and player wages

Leading goalscorers

9 Carlos Tevez (Juventus)
8 Jose Callejon (Napoli)
Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)
Mauro Icardi (Internazionale)
Jeremy Menez (Milan)

LITHUANIA

LITHUANIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zalgiris (C)	36	25	9	2	92	17	84
Kruoja	36	19	9	8	67	34	66
Atlantas	36	19	8	9	76	36	65
Trakai	36	18	9	9	65	38	63
Suduva	36	17	11	8	70	38	62
Ekranas	36	12	9	15	51	58	45
Siauliai	36	12	4	20	50	63	40
Granitas	36	9	10	17	47	67	37
Banga	36	8	6	22	29	65	30
Dainava (R)	36	2	3	31	12	143	9

NORWAY

● *Brann relegated after losing rel/prom play-off*

POLAND

Regular season

Nov 21: Ruch 1 Slask 0; Belchatow 0 Legia 3.
Nov 22: Pogon 1 Podbeskidzie 2; Wisla 2 Gornik Leczna 0; Korona 2 Zawisza 2.
Nov 23: Lechia 1 Jagiellonia 1; Piast 3 Lech 2.
Nov 24: Cracovia 1 Gornik Zabrze 2.
Nov 28: Gornik Leczna 3 Ruch 0; Piast 0 Wisla 0.
Nov 29: Podbeskidzie 1 Lechia 0; Jagiellonia 0 Zawisza 0; Korona 2 Belchatow 0.
Nov 30: Lech 3 Gornik Zabrze 0; Slask 1 Pogon 1.
Dec 1: Legia 2 Cracovia 0.
Dec 5: Zawisza 0 Slask 1; Gornik Zabrze 0 Legia 4.
Dec 6: Pogon 2 Korona 0; Belchatow 1 Gornik Leczna 1; Cracovia 1 Jagiellonia 1.
Dec 7: Lechia 3 Piast 1; Wisla 1 Lech 2.
Dec 8: Ruch 2 Podbeskidzie 0.
Dec 12: Korona 1 Cracovia 2; Slask 2 Belchatow 1.
Dec 13: Ruch 1 Wisla 2; Jagiellonia 1 Gornik Zabrze 0; Lech 1 Lechia 0.
Dec 14: Podb'zie 2 Zawisza 1; Gornik L 3 Legia 1.
Dec 15: Piast 1 Pogon 0.

POLAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia	19	12	2	5	41	20	38
Slask	19	10	5	4	31	21	35
Lech	19	8	8	3	37	20	32
Wisla	19	9	5	5	34	24	32
Jagiellonia	19	9	5	5	30	23	32
Gornik Zabrze	19	8	4	7	25	26	28
Pogon	19	7	6	6	26	27	27
Podbeskidzie	19	8	3	8	29	31	27
Belchatow	19	7	6	6	16	20	27
Piast	19	7	5	7	23	26	26
Gornik Leczna	19	6	6	7	24	25	24
Cracovia	19	6	4	9	19	27	22
Lechia	19	5	6	8	24	27	21
Korona	19	6	3	10	19	30	21
Ruch	19	4	5	10	20	28	17
Zawisza	19	2	3	14	19	42	9

30-round regular season (15x2); top 8 will form championship group, bottom 8 will form relegation group (from which the bottom 2 will go down)

PORTUGAL

Nov 28: Guimaraes 2 Moreirense 1.
Nov 29: Belenenses 0 Arouca 0; Penafiel 1 Braga 6; Sporting 3 Setubal 0.
Nov 30: Gil Vic'te 0 Nacional 0; Maritimo 4 Boavista 0; Academica 0 Benfica 2; Porto 5 Rio Ave 0.
Dec 1: Pacos de Ferreira 1 Estoril 1.
Dec 5: Boavista 1 Sporting 3.
Dec 6: Rio Ave 0 Gil Vicente 0; Benfica 3 Belenenses 0; Estoril 1 Setubal 0; Academica 0 Porto 3.
Dec 7: Moreirense 2 Pacos de Ferreira 0; Arouca 0 Penafiel 1; Braga 0 Guimaraes 0.
Dec 8: Nacional 3 Maritimo 0.
Dec 12: Setubal 0 Boavista 1.
Dec 13: Gil Vicente 1 Academica 1; Pacos de Ferreira 2 Arouca 1; Penafiel 2 Nacional 1; Belenenses 0 Braga 1.
Dec 14: Guimaraes 0 Rio Ave 0; Maritimo 0 Estoril 0; Sporting 1 Moreirense 1; Porto 0 Benfica 2.

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica	13	11	1	1	30	7	34
Porto	13	8	4	1	27	7	28
Guimaraes	13	8	4	1	22	9	28
Braga	13	7	4	2	22	8	25
Sporting	13	6	6	1	25	12	24
Pacos Ferreira	13	6	4	3	18	14	22
Belenenses	13	6	3	4	15	15	21
Rio Ave	13	5	4	4	19	15	19
Moreirense	13	4	5	4	11	12	17
Maritimo	13	5	1	7	19	18	16
Estoril	13	3	6	4	17	21	15
Boavista	13	4	1	8	9	25	13
Nacional	13	3	3	7	11	15	12
Setubal	13	3	2	8	8	21	11
Penafiel	13	3	1	9	10	26	10
Academica	13	1	6	6	8	18	9
Arouca	13	2	3	8	7	21	9
Gil Vicente	13	0	6	7	8	22	6

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

ROMANIA

Nov 21: Viitorul 2 Con'dia 2; Gaz Metan 1 Dinamo 2.
Nov 22: Astra 1 Universitatea Cluj 1; Ceahlaul 0 Otelul 1; Steaua 2 Brasov 0.
Nov 23: Pandurii 1 Botosani 2; CFR 4 CSM Studentesc 0; Petrolul 2 Targu Mures 0.
Nov 24: CS Universitatea 2 Rapid 0.
Nov 28: Concordia 2 Gaz Metan 0; CSM Studentesc 3 Pandurii 0.
Nov 29: CS Universitatea 2 Ceahlaul 0; Universitatea Cluj 0 Otelul 0; Rapid 0 CFR 0.
Nov 30: Brasov 1 Viitorul 3; Targu Mures 0 Astra 0; Dinamo 0 Petrolul 0.
Dec 1: Botosani 0 Steaua 2.
Dec 5: Gaz Metan 2 Brasov 1; Viitorul 1 Botosani 2.
Dec 6: Ceahlaul 0 Universitatea Cluj 6; Pandurii 2 Rapid 0; Astra 6 Dinamo 1.
Dec 7: Otelul 0 Targu Mures 2; Steaua 1 CSM Studentesc 0; CFR 0 CS Universitatea 0.
Dec 8: Petrolul 2 Concordia 2.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Steaua	17	14	1	2	36	8	43
CFR	17	10	4	3	27	10	34
Petrolul	17	9	6	2	29	11	33
Astra	17	8	6	3	30	13	30
Targu Mures	17	8	6	3	21	11	30
CS Univ'tatea	17	8	5	4	22	20	29
Botosani	17	8	3	6	22	23	27
Dinamo	17	7	5	5	27	26	26
Viitorul	17	5	6	6	23	23	21
Brasov	17	5	4	8	20	28	19
Univ Cluj	17	4	6	7	21	21	18
Pandurii	17	4	6	7	20	24	18
Gaz Metan	17	4	6	7	18	24	18
Concordia	17	3	8	6	17	25	17
Ceahlaul	17	3	5	9	14	32	14
CSM Stud'tesc	17	2	6	9	14	28	12
Otelul	17	2	6	9	7	24	12
Rapid	17	2	5	10	7	24	11

34-round season (17x2); bottom 6 will be relegated

MEXICO

Dozen for America

America claimed a record 12th domestic title after overturning a first-leg deficit to beat Tigres 3-1 on aggregate in the Apertura Final.

Ecuadorian striker Joffre Guerron gave Tigres a 1-0 lead after their home leg and extended their unbeaten Liga MX run to 15 games. But America hit back with goals from Michael Arroyo, Pablo Aguilar and Oribe Peralta in the return.

Tigres finished the second leg with eight men as Hernan Burbano, Damian Alvarez and Nahuel Guzman were all sent off. Luis Mendoza of America was also dismissed.

Success...America coach Antonio Mohamed celebrates with his players

PANAMA

Ninth for San Francisco

San Francisco won their ninth national title, beating Sporting San Miguelito 1-0 in the Apertura Final with a goal from midfielder Richard Rodriguez.

It was a first title since 2011's Clausura for San Francisco, who finished third in the regular season.

RUSSIA

Nov 22: Ural 1 Rubin 3; Torpedo 2 Rostov 1; Krasnodar 2 CSKA 1; Zenit 1 Kuban 0.
Nov 23: Dynamo 3 Terek 0; Arsenal 4 Amkar 0; Spartak 4 Mordovia 2.
Nov 24: Lokomotiv 0 Ufa 0.
Nov 28: Rostov 1 Amkar 1.
Nov 29: Arsenal 1 Ural 2; CSKA 5 Ufa 0; Mordovia 1 Zenit 0; Kuban 1 Torpedo 1.
Nov 30: Lokomotiv 1 Spartak 0; Rubin 1 Dynamo 1; Terek 0 Krasnodar 1.
Dec 2: Arsenal 0 Ufa 1; CSKA 2 Amkar 1.
Dec 3: Rubin 0 Zenit 1; Lokomotiv 1 Ural 0; Kuban 1 Krasnodar 1; Terek 0 Torpedo 1.
Dec 4: Mordovia 0 Dynamo 1; Spartak 1 Rostov 1.
Dec 6: Zenit 4 Krasnodar 0; Kuban 0 CSKA 1.
Dec 7: Terek 0 Lokomotiv 0; Dynamo 5 Amkar 0.
Dec 8: Mordovia 0 Rubin 1; Torpedo 2 Ufa 2; Rostov 0 Arsenal 1; Spartak 2 Ural 0.

RUSSIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit	17	13	2	2	41	10	41
CSKA	17	11	1	5	38	16	34
Dynamo	16	10	2	4	36	19	32
Krasnodar	17	9	4	4	26	16	31
Lokomotiv	17	8	6	3	20	12	30
Spartak	17	8	5	4	26	20	29
Rubin	17	7	6	4	23	18	27
Kuban	17	6	8	3	18	19	26
Terek	17	7	4	6	18	14	25
Mordovia	17	6	2	9	13	26	20
Ufa	17	4	6	7	14	21	18
Torpedo	17	3	5	9	15	32	14
Ural	17	4	1	12	15	26	13
Amkar	16	3	3	10	12	29	12
Arsenal	17	3	2	12	10	25	11
Rostov	17	2	5	10	15	37	11

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

SCOTLAND

Regular season

Nov 22: Celtic 2 Dundee 1; Dundee United 3 Kilmarnock 1; Inverness 3 Motherwell 1; St Johnstone 2 Ross County 1; Hamilton 3 St Mirren 0.
Nov 23: Partick 0 Aberdeen 1.
Dec 3: Celtic 1 Partick 0.
Dec 5: Ross County 2 Dundee United 3.
Dec 6: Motherwell 0 Celtic 1; Aberdeen 3 Hamilton 0; Dundee 1 Inverness 2; Partick 1 Kilmarnock 1; St Mirren 0 St Johnstone 1.
Dec 13: Dundee United 0 Aberdeen 2; Hamilton 2 Dundee 1; Inverness 0 Partick 4; Motherwell 2 Ross County 2; Kilmarnock 0 St Johnstone 1.
Dec 14: Celtic 4 St Mirren 1.

SCOTLAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	16	12	2	2	33	10	38
Inverness	16	10	2	4	24	17	32
Dundee Utd	16	10	1	5	28	19	31
Aberdeen	16	10	1	5	25	17	31
Hamilton	16	9	3	4	29	18	30
St Johnstone	16	7	2	7	14	17	23
Kilmarnock	16	6	3	7	17	21	21
Dundee	16	5	5	6	21	21	20
Partick	16	5	4	7	22	19	19
Motherwell	16	3	2	11	11	27	11
Ross County	16	2	3	11	17	36	9
St Mirren	16	2	2	12	11	30	8

33-round regular season (11x3); top 6 will form championship group, bottom 6 will form relegation group (from which the bottom team will go down and the 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs)

SPAIN

Friday, November 21
Athletic Bilbao 3 (Aduriz 29, Viguera 44, Iturraspe 78)
Espanyol 1 (Victor Sanchez 84) Att: 28,000

Saturday, November 22
Atletico Madrid 3 (Tiago 12, Griezmann 42, Godin 83)
Malaga 1 (Santa Cruz 64) Att: 44,200

Barcelona 5 (Messi 21, 72, 78, Neymar 49, Rakitic 65)
Sevilla 1 (Jordi Alba og 47) Att: 78,283

Deportivo La Coruna 0
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 18,521

Eibar 0
Real Madrid 4 (Rodriguez 23, Cristiano Ronaldo 43, pen 83, Benzema 70) Att: 5,859

Sunday, November 23
Elche 2 (Lomban pen 63, Jonathas 75)
Cordoba 2 (Fidel 12, Cartabia 60) Att: 22,639

Levante 2 (Victor 58, Morales 74)
Valencia 1 (Parejo 73) Att: 17,200

Rayo Vallecano 1 (Bueno 20)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 7,100

Villarreal 2 (Mario 38, Moreno 43)
Getafe 1 (Lacen 61) Att: 19,500

Monday, November 24
Granada 0
Almeria 0 Att: 16,500

Friday, November 28
Real Sociedad 3 (Vela 3, 31, 53)
Elche 0 Att: 17,000

Saturday, November 29
Celta Vigo 0
Eibar 1 (Manu 30) Att: 16,000

Espanyol 2 (Caicedo 19, Sergio Garcia 35)
Levante 1 (Morales 12) Att: 12,723

Getafe 1 (Lafita 90+1)
Athletic Bilbao 2 (San Jose 36, Benat 90) Att: 8,100

Malaga 1 (Santa Cruz 90+2)
Real Madrid 2 (Benzema 18, Bale 83) Att: 29,025

Sunday, November 30
Atletico Madrid 2 (Saul Niguez 43, Arda 55)
Deportivo La Coruna 0 Att: 45,000

Cordoba 0
Villarreal 2 (Vietto 24, Uche 70) Att: 15,998

Sevilla 5 (Bacca 24, 79, Banega 65, Mbia 89, Gameiro 90+2)
Granada 1 (El Arabi pen 42) Att: 30,347

Valencia 0
Barcelona 1 (Busquets 90+3) Att: 51,200

Monday, December 1
Almeria 0
Rayo Vallecano 1 (Kakuta 86) Att: 8,500

Saturday, December 6
Athletic Bilbao 0
Cordoba 1 (Ghilas 23) Att: 38,500

Deportivo La Coruna 0
Malaga 1 (Darder 22) Att: 19,000

Elche 0
Atletico Madrid 2 (Gimenez 17, Mandzukic 53) Att: 18,290

Real Madrid 3 (Cristiano Ronaldo pen 36, 65, 81)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 80,300

Sunday, December 7
Barcelona 5 (Messi 45, 50, 81, Pique 53, Pedro 78)
Espanyol 1 (Sergio Garcia 13) Att: 76,057

Granada 1 (Success 89)
Valencia 1 (Negredo 83) Att: 18,300

Rayo Vallecano 0
Sevilla 1 (Bacca 8) Att: 11,604

Villarreal 4 (Zubikarai og 64, Cheryshev 73, Moi Gomez 80, 86)
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 16,000

Monday, December 8
Eibar 5 (Piovaccari 3, Saul 21, Raul Albentosa 31, Raul Navas 57, Capa 75)
Almeria 2 (Soriano 43, Mendez 77) Att: 4,200

Levante 1 (Rafael Martins 71)
Getafe 1 (Yoda 56) Att: 13,582

Friday, December 12
Almeria 1 (Verza 39)
Real Madrid 4 (Isco 34, Bale 42, Cristiano Ronaldo 81, 88) Att: 13,950

Saturday, December 13
Cordoba 0
Levante 0 Att: 18,600

Getafe 0
Barcelona 0 Att: 9,500

Malaga 1 (Samuel 21)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 23,650

Valencia 3 (Feghouli 13, 34, Piatti 36)
Rayo Vallecano 0 Att: 36,800

Sunday, December 14
Atletico Madrid 0
Villarreal 1 (Vietto 84) Att: 37,000

Espanyol 2 (Caicedo 34, Stuani 90)
Granada 1 (El Arabi 61) Att: 18,405

Real Sociedad 1 (Vela 3)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (De Marcos 61) Att: 26,651

Sevilla 0
Eibar 0 Att: 20,000

Monday, December 15
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Farina 22)
Elche 0 Att: 14,167

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	15	13	0	2	55	13	39
Barcelona	15	11	2	2	36	7	35
Atletico	15	10	2	3	27	13	32
Sevilla	15	9	3	3	25	17	30
Valencia	15	8	4	3	28	13	28
Villarreal	15	8	3	4	24	14	27
Malaga	15	8	3	4	18	14	27
Celta	15	5	5	5	17	17	20
Eibar	15	5	5	5	19	21	20
Athletic	15	5	4	6	13	16	19
Espanyol	15	4	5	6	17	23	17
Rayo	15	5	2	8	16	28	17
Getafe	15	4	4	7	11	19	16
Real Sociedad	15	3	5	7	16	21	14
Levante	15	3	5	7	11	29	14
Deportivo	15	3	4	8	13	24	13
Granada	15	2	6	7	9	25	12
Cordoba	15	1	8	6	11	22	11
Almeria	15	2	4	9	12	24	10
Elche	15	2	4	9	12	30	10

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading goalscorers

25 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
13 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
11 Neymar (Barcelona)
10 Carlos Bacca (Sevilla)
8 Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)

SWITZERLAND

Nov 22: Sion 1 Zurich 3; Grasshopper 3 Lucerne 2.
Nov 23: Basle 3 Aarau 0; St Gallen 3 Vaduz 3; Thun 0 Young Boys 1.
Nov 29: Aarau 0 Lucerne 3; Sion 3 Grasshopper 3.
Nov 30: Young Boys 4 St Gallen 2; Vaduz 0 Thun 1; Zurich 1 Basle 2.
Dec 3: Lucerne 1 Young Boys 2.
Dec 6: Lucerne 0 Basle 3; G'hopper 0 Young Boys 1.
Dec 7: Thun 2 Zurich 1; Vaduz 1 Aarau 0; St Gallen 2 Sion 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	18	13	2	3	40	18	41
Zurich	18	10	3	5	33	21	33
Young Boys	18	10	3	5	30	21	33
St Gallen	18	8	5	5	30	26	29
Thun	18	8	5	5	24	20	29
Grasshopper	18	5	4	9	23	31	19
Vaduz	18	4	6	8	14	27	18
Aarau	18	3	7	8	16	27	16
Sion	18	3	6	9	18	27	15
Lucerne	18	2	7	9	21	31	13

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

TURKEY

Nov 22: Rizespor 0 Basaksehir 2; Akhisar 1 Mersin 1; Galatasaray 0 Trabzonspor 3.
Nov 23: Genclerbirligi 2 Karabukspor 2; Konyaspor 2 Gaziantepspor 0; Eskisehirspor 2 Kayseri Erciyesspor 1; Besiktas 2 Kasimpasa 0.
Nov 24: Balikesirspor 1 Sivasspor 3; Bursaspor 1 Fenerbahce 1.
Nov 28: Akhisar 0 Konyaspor 0; B'ksehir 0 Bur'spor 0.
Nov 29: Kasimpasa 3 Rizespor 1; K Erciyesspor 4 Balikesirspor 0; Gaziantepspor 0 Galatasaray 1.
Nov 30: Mersin 2 Sivasspor 0; F'bahce 2 Esk'spor 2.
Dec 1: Karabukspor 1 Besiktas 2; Trabzonspor 4 Genclerbirligi 1.
Dec 6: Konyaspor 2 Mersin 0; Genclerbirligi 2 Gaziantepspor 0; Balikesirspor 0 Fenerbahce 1; Galatasaray 2 Akhisar 1.
Dec 7: Bursaspor 5 Kasimpasa 1; Rizespor 0 Karabukspor 3; Eskisehirspor 0 Basaksehir 1; Besiktas 3 Trabzonspor 0.

World Service

AUSTRALIA

Inaugural winners

Adelaide United won the inaugural Australian FA Cup, beating Perth Glory 1-0 in the Final. Sergio Cirio scored the winner after Perth's Josh Risdon's second-half dismissal.

"We deserve it, we won against five A-League sides," said coach Josep Gombau.

First...Adelaide's Dylan McGowan

CHINA

Last-gasp Cup strike

Australian defender Ryan McGowan headed a 95th-minute winner as Shandong Luneng beat Jiangsu Sainty 5-4 on aggregate to win the Chinese FA Cup.

Shandong led 4-2 from the first leg, but Jiangsu levelled with goals from Roda Antar and Eleilson, which put them in front on away goals – until McGowan struck with just 10 seconds remaining.

INDIA

Big crowds for ISL

Organisers claim the Indian Super League is the fourth-most popular in the world. After six weeks, the average attendance was 24,357 – only the Bundesliga, Premier League and La Liga attract more.

KUWAIT

Seven for Arabi

Al Arabi won the Crown Prince Cup for a seventh time, beating Kuwait SC 4-2 after extra time in the Final.

Arabi led through two goals from Ahmed Hayel

Dec 8: Sivasspor 1 Kayseri Erciyesspor 1.
Dec 12: Fenerbahce 4 Sivasspor 1.
Dec 13: Basaksehir 1 Balikesirspor 0; Akhisar 1 Genclerbirligi 1; Konyaspor 0 Galatasaray 5; Kasimpasa 1 Eskisehirspor 0.
Dec 14: Karabukspor 3 Bursaspor 2; Mersin 1 Kayseri Erciyesspor 1; Gaziantepspor 0 Besiktas 1.
Dec 15: Trabzonspor 3 Rizespor 2.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Besiktas	13	9	2	2	20	11	29
Galatasaray	13	9	1	3	20	15	28
Fenerbahce	13	8	3	2	21	13	27
Basaksehir	13	5	6	2	15	5	21
Trabzonspor	13	5	6	2	23	19	21
Mersin	13	6	3	4	19	15	21
Bursaspor	13	5	4	4	23	14	19
Kasimpasa	13	5	4	4	20	21	19
Genclerbirligi	13	4	5	4	17	16	17
Akhisar	13	4	5	4	15	16	17
Konyaspor	13	4	4	5	12	15	16
Gaziantepspor	13	4	3	6	13	18	15
K Erciyesspor	13	2	8	3	17	15	14
Karabukspor	13	4	2	7	18	18	14
Eskisehirspor	13	2	6	5	15	20	12
Sivasspor	13	2	4	7	13	22	10
Rizespor	13	2	4	7	12	22	10
Balikesirspor	13	1	2	10	10	28	5

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

UKRAINE

Nov 21: Karpaty 0 Shakhtar 2.
Nov 22: Olimpik 3 Illichivets 2; Dnipro 1 Hoverla 1.
Nov 23: Metalurh Donetsk 1 Volyn 2; Vorskla 2 Zorya 0; Metalurh Zaporizhya 2 Dynamo 4.
Nov 29: Olimpik 2 Chornomorets 1.
Nov 30: Metalurh Zaporizhya 0 Shakhtar 4; Volyn 3 Illichivets 1; Metalist 4 Zorya 2; Vorskla 0 Dynamo 3; Karpaty 1 Hoverla 0.
Dec 1: Dnipro 1 Metalurh Donetsk 1.
Dec 5: Dynamo 3 Metalurh Donetsk 0; Shakhtar 4 Hoverla 1.
Dec 6: Olimpik 1 Vorskla 1; Zoyra 2 Dnipro 1.
Dec 7: Illichivets 1 Metalurh Zaporizhya 2; Chornomorets 0 Karpaty 0.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	14	11	3	0	33	7	36
Shakhtar	14	10	1	3	32	8	31
Dnipro	14	8	4	2	25	11	28
Olimpik	14	6	4	4	14	26	22
Zorya	14	6	3	5	17	16	21
Volyn	13	6	2	5	21	20	20
Metalist	12	5	4	3	19	17	19
Vorskla	14	4	6	4	14	12	18
Chornomorets	13	3	6	4	13	13	15
Metalurh D	14	3	5	6	15	19	14
Metalurh Z	14	3	3	8	12	28	12
Hoverla	14	1	6	7	9	20	9
Karpaty[1]	14	3	4	7	11	19	4
Illichivets	14	0	3	11	12	31	3

26-round season (13x2); bottom team will be relegated
[1]9pts deducted for failing to comply with contract obligations

SOUTH AMERICA

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - Nov 19/20; 2nd legs - Nov 26/27
Atletico Nacional (Col) v Sao Paulo (Bra)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Atletico Nacional 4-1 on pens)
Boca Juniors (Arg) v River Plate (Arg)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)

Final

1st leg
Dec 3
Atletico Nacional 1 (Berrio 34)
River Plate 1 (Pisculichi 66)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Marques Ribeiro (Bra)

2nd leg
Dec 10
River Plate 2 (Mercado 55, Pezzella 59)
Atletico Nacional 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)
River Plate 3-1 on agg

ARGENTINA

Transitional tournament

Nov 20: Defensa y Justicia 1 Newell's 0.
Nov 21: Banfield 3 Quilmes 1.
Nov 22: Rafaela 2 San Lorenzo 0; Olimpo 1 Rosario 1; Velez 1 Godoy Cruz 4; Lanus 2 Gimnasia LP 0.
Nov 23: Belgrano 1 Tigre 2; Estudiantes 0 Defensa y Justicia 0; Boca 3 Independiente 1; Racing 1 River Plate 0.
Nov 24: Newell's 2 Arsenal 4.
Nov 28: Gimnasia LP 3 Quilmes 0; Defensa y Justicia 0 Velez 2.
Nov 29: San Lorenzo 4 Estudiantes 0; Independiente 1 Newell's 0.
Nov 30: Rosario 0 Racing 3; Tigre 3 Rafaela 1; River Plate 3 Banfield 2; Lanus 2 Boca 2.
Dec 1: Godoy Cruz 0 Olimpo 3; Arsenal 0 Belgrano 2.
Dec 5: Estudiantes 4 Tigre 2; Velez 0 San Lorenzo 2.
Dec 6: Banfield 2 Rosario 3; Rafaela 1 Arsenal 6; Olimpo 0 Defensa y Justicia 0; Belgrano 4 Independiente 0.
Dec 7: Boca 0 Gimnasia LP 2; Newell's 0 Lanus 0.
Dec 14: Quilmes 0 River Plate 1; Racing 1 Godoy Cruz 0.

ARGENTINA – TRANSITIONAL – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Racing (C)	19	13	2	4	30	16	41
River Plate	19	11	6	2	34	13	39
Lanus	19	10	5	4	28	23	35
Independiente	19	10	3	6	31	29	33
Boca	19	9	4	6	25	23	31
Estudiantes	19	9	4	6	23	23	31
Tigre	19	8	2	9	30	26	26
San Lorenzo	19	8	2	9	26	22	26
Arsenal	19	7	5	7	27	25	26
Belgrano	19	7	4	8	26	26	25
Velez	19	7	4	8	21	22	25
Newell's	19	6	7	6	21	24	25
Rafaela	19	7	4	8	25	29	25
Gimnasia LP	19	6	6	7	16	15	24
Rosario	19	6	3	10	21	28	21
Godoy Cruz	19	5	6	8	31	39	21
Banfield	19	5	5	9	25	25	20
Def y Justicia	19	5	5	9	19	30	20
Olimpo	19	4	7	8	15	22	19
Quilmes	19	2	6	11	17	31	12

No relegation after transitional

BRAZIL

Nov 19: Paranaense 1 Santos 1; Botafogo 0 Figueirense 1; Vitoria 1 Coritiba 1; Criciuma 0 Bahia 1; Goias 0 Corinthians 1; Palmeiras 0 Sport 2; Mineiro 4 Flamengo 0.
Nov 20: Fluminense 1 Chapecoense 4; Gremio 1 Cruzeiro 2.
Nov 22: Internacional 2 Mineiro 1; Bahia 1 Paranaense 2.
Nov 23: Flamengo 1 Criciuma 1; Sport 2 Fluminense 2; Santos 0 Sao Paulo 1; Cruzeiro 2 Goias 1; Figueirense 2 Vitoria 0; Corinthians 1 Gremio 0; Coritiba 2 Palmeiras 0; Chapecoense 2 Botafogo 0.
Nov 29: Internacional 3 Palmeiras 1; Criciuma 2 Sport 2; Flamengo 4 Vitoria 0.
Nov 30: Fluminense 5 Corinthians 2; Sao Paulo 1 Figueirense 1; Santos 2 Botafogo 0; Chapecoense 1 Cruzeiro 1; Paranaense 1 Goias 0; Bahia 1 Gremio 0; Mineiro 1 Coritiba 2.
Dec 6: Corinthians 2 Criciuma 1; Figueirense 1 Internacional 2.
Dec 7: Botafogo 0 Mineiro 0; Sport 1 Sao Paulo 0; Palmeiras 1 Paranaense 1; Coritiba 3 Bahia 2; Cruzeiro 2 Fluminense 1; Vitoria 0 Santos 1; Gremio 1 Flamengo 1; Goias 4 Chapecoense 2.

BRAZIL – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruzeiro (C)	38	24	8	6	67	38	80
Sao Paulo	38	20	10	8	59	40	70
Internacional	38	21	6	11	53	41	69
Corinthians	38	19	12	7	49	31	69
Mineiro	38	17	11	10	51	38	62
Fluminense	38	17	10	11	61	42	61
Gremio	38	17	10	11	36	24	61
Paranaense	38	15	9	14	43	42	54
Santos	38	15	8	15	42	35	53
Flamengo	38	14	10	14	46	47	52
Sport	38	14	10	14	36	46	52
Goias	38	13	8	17	38	40	47
Figueirense	38	13	8	17	37	47	47
Coritiba	38	12	11	15	42	45	47
Chapecoense	38	11	10	17	39	44	43
Palmeiras	38	11	7	20	34	59	40
Vitoria (R)	38	10	8	20	37	54	38
Bahia (R)	38	9	10	19	31	43	37
Botafogo (R)	38	9	7	22	31	48	34
Criciuma (R)	38	7	11	20	28	56	32

CHILE

CHILE – APERTURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Chile (C)	17	14	2	1	37	13	44
Wanderers	17	14	1	2	31	14	43
Colo Colo	17	13	2	2	34	11	41
Palestino	17	10	1	6	28	21	31
Huachipato	17	8	2	7	30	25	26
U Espanola	17	8	1	8	22	24	25
Audax Italiano	17	6	5	6	26	21	23
O'Higgins	17	6	5	6	27	25	23
U La Calera	17	6	4	7	25	22	22
Barnechea	17	6	2	9	16	26	20
Nublense	17	5	4	8	21	29	19
Univ Concep'n	17	4	6	7	18	23	18
San Marcos	17	5	3	9	12	21	18
Univ Catolica	17	5	2	10	20	25	17
Cobresal	17	4	5	8	24	30	17
Dep Iquique	17	3	7	7	22	31	16
Antofagasta	17	4	4	9	13	25	16
Cobreloa	17	3	2	12	19	39	11

No relegation after apertura

PARAGUAY

PARAGUAY – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad (C)	22	14	4	4	41	18	46
Cerro Porteno	22	13	5	4	43	20	44
Guarani	22	12	5	5	49	29	41
Spvo Luqueno	22	9	8	5	24	23	35
Nacional	22	9	5	8	18	19	32
Olimpia	22	8	6	8	28	24	30
General Diaz	22	8	5	9	26	33	29
3 Febrero (R)[1]	22	7	4	11	22	35	25
Sol America	22	6	6	10	24	32	24
Dep Capiata	22	5	6	11	22	34	21
Rubio Nu	22	4	8	10	21	33	20
12 Octubre (R)[1]	22	4	4	14	23	41	16

[1]The 2 teams with the lowest points-per-game average over the 3 most recent seasons were relegated

PERU

Clausura championship decider
(the 2 teams finished level on points at the top of the clausura table)
Dec 4: Alianza Lima 0 Sporting Cristal 1.

URUGUAY

URUGUAY – APERTURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional (C)	15	14	0	1	34	7	42
Racing	15	10	2	3	32	26	32
Penarol	15	7	4	4	28	16	25
River Plate	15	8	1	6	26	18	25
Tanque Sisley	15	6	5	4	18	18	23
Defensor	15	6	3	6	28	22	21
Sud America	15	5	5	5	17	17	20
Juventud	15	6	2	7	21	22	20
Atenas	15	6	2	7	20	22	20
Danubio	15	5	5	5	17	20	20
Rentistas	15	6	2	7	18	24	20
Wanderers	15	6	1	8	21	21	19
Fenix	15	5	2	8	20	26	17
Rampla Jnrs	15	5	2	8	18	27	17
Cerro	15	3	2	10	11	32	11
Tacuarembo	15	1	4	10	17	28	7

No relegation after apertura

CONCACAF

GRENADA

GRENADA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paradise (C)	18	14	1	3	49	15	43
Hurricane	18	9	6	3	25	19	33
Grenada Boys	18	9	2	7	28	23	29
Hard Rock	18	8	3	7	29	21	27
QPR	18	8	2	8	31	29	26
St John's	18	8	2	8	29	33	26
Fontenoy Utd	18	8	1	9	23	29	25
Mount Rich	18	7	3	8	30	34	24
Happy Hill (R)	18	6	4	8	20	19	22
Five Stars (R)	18	0	2	16	18	60	2

MEXICO

Apertura

Regular season
Nov 21: Morelia 1 Guadalajara 2; Tijuana 3 Leon 2.
Nov 22: America 1 Atlas 2; Puebla 3 Santos 3; Tigres 2 Toluca 1; Leones Negros 1 Cruz Azul 1; Pachuca 1 Veracruz 0; Chiapas 2 Queretaro 1.
Nov 23: Pumas 4 Monterrey 2.

MEXICO – APERTURA: REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
America (Q)	17	9	4	4	28	18	31
Tigres (Q)	17	8	7	2	25	17	31
Atlas (Q)	17	9	4	4	22	20	31
Toluca (Q)	17	8	5	4	24	18	29
Chiapas (Q)	17	7	7	3	24	20	28
Monterrey (Q)	17	8	3	6	23	20	27
Pachuca (Q)	17	7	4	6	20	18	25
Pumas (Q)	17	6	6	5	24	20	24
Santos	17	5	8	4	23	24	23
Leon	17	7	1	9	29	27	22
Tijuana	17	4	9	4	21	19	21
Queretaro	17	6	3	8	23	22	21
Cruz Azul	17	5	6	6	16	15	21
Leones Negros	17	3	8	6	10	16	17
Puebla	17	2	10	5	15	21	16
Guadalajara	17	3	7	7	13	20	16
Veracruz	17	3	6	8	8	15	15
Morelia	17	2	4	11	16	34	10

Top 8 entered championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

Big draw...ISL action

but were pegged back by an Ahmad Ibrahim own goal and Makelele's equaliser with four minutes remaining.

Mohamed Jarragh and Hussain Al Moussawi then won it in extra time.

SOUTH KOREA

Seoul make amends

Having suffered the disappointment of losing the Korean FA Cup Final on penalties to Seongnam, Seoul snatched an AFC Champions League berth on the last day of the season.

Trailing at Jeju United while Pohang Steelers led at home to second-placed Suwon Bluewings, they were set to finish six points off third place with 21 minutes left to play. But after battling back to win 2-1, and seeing Pohang lose by the same scoreline, Seoul pipped Steelers on goal difference.

NEW ZEALAND

First OFC President's Cup

Auckland City won the inaugural six-team invitational OFC President's Cup, coming from behind to beat Amicale of Vanuatu 2-1 in the Final.

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Nov 26/27; 2nd legs - Nov 29/30

Chiapas v Toluca 1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, Toluca on higher regular-season finish)
Monterrey v Atlas 0-1, 2-0 (agg 2-1)
Pachuca v Tigres 1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, Tigres on higher regular-season finish)
Pumas v America 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, America on higher regular-season finish)

Semi-finals

1st legs - Dec 4; 2nd legs - Dec 7

Monterrey v America 0-3, 0-0 (agg 0-3)
Toluca v Tigres 0-0, 0-0 (agg 0-0, Tigres on higher regular-season finish)

Final, 1st leg

Dec 11

Tigres 1 (Guerron 64)
America 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 41,603. **Ref:** Garcia

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 14

America 3 (Arroyo 36, Aguilar 62, Peralta 78)
Tigres 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Delgadillo
America 3-1 on agg
Sent off: Burbano 64, Alvarez 67, Guzman 72 (all Tigres); Mendoza (America) 79

PANAMA

Apertura Final

Nov 22: Sporting San Miguelito 0
San Francisco 1.

UNITED STATES

Championship play-offs

Semi-finals

1st legs - Nov 23; 2nd legs - Nov 29/30

Los Angeles v Seattle
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Los Angeles on away goals)
New York Red Bulls v New England
1-2, 2-2 (agg 3-4)

Final

Dec 7 - Carson (StubHub Center)

Los Angeles 2 (Zardes 52, Keane 111)
New England 1 (Tierney 79)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 27,000.
Ref: Geiger

AFRICA

CONFEDERATION CUP

Final

1st leg

Nov 29

Sewe Sport (IvC) 2 (Kouame pen 25, Assale 83)
Al Ahly (Egy) 1 (Trezeguet 59)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Otogo-Castane (Gab)

2nd leg

Dec 6

Al Ahly 1 (Moteab 90+6)
Sewe Sport 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Seechurn (Mrs)
Agg 2-2; Al Ahly on away goals

MOZAMBIQUE

MOZAMBIQUE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Muculmana (C)	26	15	8	3	44	15	53
Ferroviario N	26	15	7	4	26	12	52
Ferroviario B	26	13	8	5	29	15	47
Desportivo M	26	12	5	9	35	26	41
HCB Songo	26	12	5	9	32	29	41
Maxaquene	26	11	6	9	26	20	39
Chibuto	26	10	8	8	28	25	38
Costa do Sol	26	10	6	10	32	27	36
Desportivo N	26	7	9	10	23	28	30
Ferroviario M	26	7	8	11	24	25	29
Ferroviario Q	26	8	5	13	18	33	29
Textil (R)	26	5	7	14	15	35	22
Fer'viario P (R)	26	5	6	15	17	38	21
Estrela V'ha (R)	26	3	10	13	10	31	19

ZIMBABWE

ZIMBABWE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamos (C)	30	16	9	5	34	18	57
ZPC Kariba	30	15	11	4	42	25	56
CAPS United	30	15	8	7	38	27	53
Platinum	30	13	12	5	34	19	51
Highlanders	30	12	9	9	38	29	45
Chicken Inn	30	12	8	10	31	27	44
Hwange	30	11	9	10	38	29	42
How Mine	30	10	10	10	33	33	40
Triangle Utd	30	11	7	12	37	39	40
Buffaloes	30	11	6	13	33	43	39
Harare City	30	11	5	14	40	44	38
Chapungu Utd	30	9	10	11	30	30	37
B Rhinos (R)	30	10	7	13	21	29	37
Shabanie (R)	30	9	8	13	33	40	35
Bantu Rvrs (R)	30	6	7	17	28	47	25
Chiredzi (R)	30	3	6	21	16	47	15

ASIA

AUSTRALIA

Regular season

Nov 19: Western Sydney 0 Central Coast 0.
Nov 21: Melbourne V 1 Brisbane 0; Perth 2 Well' P 1.
Nov 22: Western Sydney 1 Newcastle 1; Melbourne City 1 Sydney 2.
Nov 23: Central Coast 0 Adelaide 2.
Nov 28: Melbourne Victory 3 Adelaide 2.
Nov 29: Brisbane 1 Perth 1; W Sydney 1 Sydney 1.
Nov 30: Wellington Phoenix 5 Melbourne City 1; Newcastle 1 Central Coast 1.
Dec 3: Western Sydney 0 Brisbane 1.
Dec 4: Sydney 1 Perth 2.
Dec 5: Central Coast 0 Melbourne Victory 3.
Dec 6: Newcastle 1 Wellington Phoenix 3; Adelaide 2 Western Sydney 0.
Dec 7: Melbourne City 1 Brisbane 0.
Dec 12: Adelaide 0 Brisbane 1; Perth 2 Newcastle 0.
Dec 13: Wellington Phoenix 1 Central Coast 1; Melbourne Victory 3 Sydney 3.

AUSTRALIA – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Perth	10	8	1	1	17	10	25
Melbourne V	10	6	4	0	24	11	22
Adelaide	10	6	2	2	15	8	20
Sydney	10	4	5	1	15	10	17
Wellington P	10	5	1	4	19	13	16
Brisbane	10	3	1	6	11	13	10
Melbourne C	9	2	3	4	13	19	9
Central Coast	10	1	4	5	6	14	7
Newcastle	10	0	4	6	8	21	4
West Sydney	9	0	3	6	6	15	3

27-round regular season (9x3); top 6 will qualify for championship play-offs. No relegation from this league

BRUNEI

BRUNEI – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Indera (C)	16	14	1	1	51	14	43
MS ABDB	16	12	1	3	44	18	37
Najip	16	8	3	5	33	23	27
MS PDB	16	7	2	7	29	26	23
LLRC	16	6	5	5	34	35	23
QAF	16	4	5	7	31	35	17
Wijaya	16	4	2	10	25	49	14
Jerudong	16	2	6	8	24	42	12
Kilanas	16	2	1	13	25	54	7
Majra Utd[1] (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1]Withdrew mid-season; results annulled

JAPAN

Nov 22: Kashima 2 Kawasaki 1; Urawa 0 Gamba 2; Ventforet 2 Sanfrecce 0; Vissel 1 Yokohama 2; Tokushima 0 Sagan 1; Vegalta 3 Cerezo 3; Omiya 1 Kashiwa 2; Tokyo 1 Albirex 3; Shimizu 2 Nagoya 2.
Nov 29: Kashiwa 3 Shimizu 1; Kawasaki 1 Sanfrecce 1; Gamba 3 Vissel 1; Cerezo 1 Kashima 4; Sagan 1 Urawa 1; Vegalta 2 Tokushima 1; Yokohama 1 Albirex 0; Ventforet 0 Tokyo 0; Nagoya 2 Omiya 1.
Dec 6: Kashima 0 Sagan 1; Urawa 1 Nagoya 2; Omiya 2 Cerezo 0; Tokyo 1 Yok'ma 1; Sh'zu 0 V'foret 0; Vissel 1 K'saki 2; Sanfrecce 2 Vegalta 0; Tok'ma 0 Gamba 0.
Dec 8: Albirex 0 Kashiwa 2.

JAPAN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gamba (C)	34	19	6	9	59	31	63
Urawa	34	18	8	8	52	32	62
Kashima	34	18	6	10	64	39	60
Kashiwa	34	17	9	8	48	40	60
Sagan	34	19	3	12	41	33	60
Kawasaki	34	16	7	11	56	43	55
Yokohama	34	14	9	11	37	29	51
Sanfrecce	34	13	11	10	44	37	50
Tokyo	34	12	12	10	47	33	48
Nagoya	34	13	9	12	47	48	48
Vissel	34	11	12	11	49	50	45
Albirex	34	12	8	14	30	36	44
Ventforet	34	9	14	11	27	31	41
Vegalta	34	9	11	14	35	50	38
Shimizu	34	10	6	18	42	60	36
Omiya (R)	34	9	8	17	44	60	35
Cerezo (R)	34	7	10	17	36	48	31
Tokushima (R)	34	3	5	26	16	74	14

SOUTH KOREA

Division split after 33-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular-season record

STH KOREA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeonbuk (C)	38	24	9	5	61	22	81
Suwon	38	19	10	9	52	37	67
Seoul	38	15	13	10	42	28	58
Pohang	38	16	10	12	50	39	58
Jeju	38	14	12	12	39	37	54
Ulsan	38	13	11	14	44	43	50

STH KOREA – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeonnam	38	14	9	15	48	53	51
Busan	38	10	13	15	37	49	43
Seongnam	38	9	13	16	32	39	40
Incheon	38	8	16	14	33	46	40
Gyeong'm (R)[1]	38	7	15	16	30	52	36
Sangju (R)	38	7	13	18	39	62	34

[1]Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions (R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

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HOLLAND: EREDIVISIE 2014-2015

AJAX

Summer signing... Viergever

GOALKEEPERS
33 Diederik **BOER** (34) 24.09.80
22 Jasper **CILLESSEN** (25) 22.04.89
31 Peter **LEEUWENBURGH** (20) 23.03.94

DEFENDERS
5 Nicolai **BOILESEN** (Den) (22) 16.02.92
24 Stefano **DENSWIL** (21) 07.05.93
29 Ruben **LIGEON** (22) 24.05.92
4 Niklas **MOISANDER** (Fin) (29) 29.09.85
12 Jairo **RIEDEWALD** (18) 09.09.96
23 Kenny **TETE** (19) 09.10.95
6 Mike **VAN DER HOORN** (22) 15.10.92
2 Ricardo **VAN RHIJN** (23) 13.06.91
3 Joel **VELTMAN** (22) 15.01.92
26 Nick **VIERGEVER** (25) 03.08.89

MIDFIELDERS
16 Lucas **ANDERSEN** (Den) (20) 13.09.94
27 Riechedly **BAZOER** (18) 12.10.96
8 Lerin **DUARTE** (24) 11.08.90
10 Davy **KLAASSEN** (21) 21.02.93
28 Tobias **SANA** (Swe) (25) 11.07.89
20 Lasse **SCHONE** (Den) (28) 27.05.86
25 Thulani **SERERO** (SAf) (24) 11.04.90
32 Niki **ZIMLING** (Den) (29) 19.04.85

FORWARDS
21 Anwar **EL GHAZI** (19) 03.05.95
7 Viktor **FISCHER** (Den) (20) 09.06.94
11 Ricardo **KISHNA** (19) 04.01.95
34 Queensy **MENIG** (19) 19.08.95
19 Arkadiusz **MILIK** (Pol) (20) 28.02.94
18 Robert **MURIC** (Cro) (18) 12.03.96
9 Kolbeinn **SIGTHORSSON** (Ice) (24) 14.03.90
30 Richairo **ZKOVIC** (18) 05.09.96

COACH
Frank **DE BOER** (44) 15.05.70

AZ

GOALKEEPERS
1 Esteban **ALVARADO** (CR) (25) 28.04.89
16 Yves **DE WINTER** (Blg) (27) 25.05.87
32 Nick **OLIJ** (19) 01.08.95
25 Sergio **ROCHET** (Uru) (21) 23.03.93

DEFENDERS
17 Djavan **ANDERSON** (19) 21.04.95
3 Jeffrey **GOUWELEEUW** (23) 10.07.91
24 Ridgeciano **HAPS** (21) 12.06.93
14 Wesley **HOEDT** (20) 06.03.94
2 Mattias **JOHANSSON** (Swe) (22) 16.02.92
23 Derrick **LUCKASSEN** (19) 03.07.95
5 Dirk **MARCELLIS** (26) 13.04.88
15 Simon **POULSEN** (Den) (30) 07.10.84
4 Jan **WUYTENS** (Blg) (19) 09.06.85

MIDFIELDERS
36 Dabney **DOS SANTOS** (18) 12.03.96
12 Viktor **ELM** (Swe) (29) 13.11.85
8 Nemanja **GUDELJ** (Ser) (23) 16.11.91
20 Thom **HAYE** (19) 09.02.95
10 Markus **HENRIKSEN** (Nor) (22) 25.07.92
6 Celso **ORTIZ** (Par) (25) 26.01.89
40 Stijn **SPIERINGS** (18) 12.03.96
11 Muamer **TANKOVIC** (Swe) (19) 22.02.95

FORWARDS
19 Eli **BABALJ** (Aus) (22) 21.02.92
22 Steven **BERGHUIS** (23) 19.12.91
35 Raymond **GYASI** (20) 05.08.94
7 Guus **HUPPERTS** (22) 25.04.92
9 Aron **JOHANNSSON** (USA) (24) 10.11.90
21 Robert **MUHREN** (25) 18.05.89
18 Mikhail **ROSHEUVEL** (24) 10.08.90

COACH
John **VAN DEN BROM** (48) 04.10.66

CAMBUUR

GOALKEEPERS
22 Leonard **NIENHUIS** (24) 16.03.90
28 Jurjan **WOUDA** (23) 02.04.91
26 Harm **ZEINSTRA** (25) 21.07.89

DEFENDERS
4 Vytautas **ANDRIUSKEVICIUS** (Lit) (24) 08.10.90
17 Lucas **BIJKER** (21) 04.03.93
15 Mart **DIJKSTRA** (24) 09.08.90
2 Wout **DROSTE** (25) 20.05.89
23 Ron **JANZEN** (20) 05.01.94
30 Calvin **MAC-INTOSH** (25) 09.08.89
5 Marlon **PEREIRA** (27) 26.03.87
3 Etienne **REIJNEN** (27) 05.04.87
31 Donovan **SLIJNGARD** (27) 28.08.87

MIDFIELDERS
6 Erik **BAKKER** (24) 21.03.90
21 Mohammed **EL MAKRINI** (27) 06.07.87
10 Dejan **MELEG** (Ser) (20) 01.10.94
11 Albert **RUSNAK** (Slk) (20) 07.07.94
25 Berend **SCHOOTSTRA** (19) 11.03.95
24 Sebastian **STEBLECKI** (Pol) (22) 16.01.92
20 Sander **VAN DER STREEK** (21) 24.03.93

FORWARDS
9 Martijn **BARTO** (30) 23.08.84
8 Daniel **DE RIDDER** (30) 06.03.84
12 Michiel **HEMMEN** (27) 28.06.87
7 Furdjel **NARSINGH** (26) 13.03.88
18 Bartholomew **OGBECHE** (Nga) (30) 01.10.84
27 Bob **SCHEPERS** (22) 30.03.92
19 Damiano **SCHET** (24) 08.04.90
14 Oobele **SCHOKKER** (30) 11.11.84

COACH
Henk **DE JONG** (50) 27.08.64

DEN HAAG

GOALKEEPERS
18 Tim **COREMANS** (23) 10.04.91
1 Martin **HANSEN** (Den) (24) 15.06.90
22 Robert **ZWINKELS** (31) 04.05.83

DEFENDERS
4 Timothy **DERIJCK** (Blg) (27) 25.05.87
28 Tyronne **EBUEHI** (19) 16.12.95
27 Richelo **FECUNDA** (18) 06.06.96
5 Wilfried **KANON** (IvC) (21) 06.07.93
2 Dione **MALONE** (25) 13.02.89
3 Vito **WORMGOOR** (26) 16.11.88
51 Gianni **ZUIVERLOON** (28) 30.12.86

MIDFIELDERS
23 Roland **ALBERG** (24) 06.08.90
17 Danny **BAKKER** (19) 16.01.95
25 Mitchell **DE VLUGT** (20) 11.03.94
10 Mathias **GEHRT** (Den) (22) 07.06.92
31 Hector **HEVEL** (18) 15.05.96
7 Kevin **JANSEN** (22) 08.04.92
6 Thomas **KRISTENSEN** (Den) (31) 17.04.83
8 Aaron **MEIJERS** (27) 28.10.87
37 Papito **MERENCIA** (Cur) (20) 04.03.94
32 Guy **SMITH** (18) 08.03.96

FORWARDS
26 Xander **HOUTKOOP** (25) 26.03.89
29 Michiel **KRAMER** (26) 03.12.88
30 Segun **OWOBOWALE** (17) 17.08.97
19 Mitchell **SCHET** (26) 28.01.88
9 Mike **VAN DUINEN** (23) 06.11.91

COACH
Henk **FRASER** (48) 07.07.66

HEERENVEEN

GOALKEEPERS
33 Maarten **DE FOCKERT** (19) 20.03.95
30 Robin **KIST** (19) 10.03.95
1 Kristoffer **NORDFELDT** (Swe) (25) 23.06.89
31 Viktor **NORING** (Swe) (23) 03.02.91

DEFENDERS
23 Jordy **BUIJS** (26) 28.12.88
25 Willem **HUIZING** (19) 01.02.95
6 Stefano **MARZO** (Blg) (23) 22.03.91
2 Kenny **OTIGBA** (Hun) (22) 29.08.92
20 Jukka **RAITALA** (Fin) (26) 15.09.88
12 Doke **SCHMIDT** (22) 07.04.92
18 Jens Jurn **STREUTKER** (21) 23.02.93
14 Joost **VAN AKEN** (20) 13.05.94
5 Pele **VAN ANHOLT** (23) 23.04.91
22 Stephen **WARMOLTS** (20) 10.04.94

MIDFIELDERS
26 Janio **BIKEL** (19) 28.06.95
27 Michael **CHACON** (20) 11.04.94
15 Marten **DE ROON** (23) 29.03.91
16 Daley **SINKGRAVEN** (19) 04.07.95
8 Morten **THORSBY** (Nor) (18) 05.05.96
21 Joey **VAN DEN BERG** (28) 13.02.86

FORWARDS
9 Thomas **DALGAARD** (Den) (30) 13.04.84
28 Pascal **HUSER** (19) 17.04.95
11 Sam **LARSSON** (Swe) (21) 10.04.93
17 Luciano **SLAGVEER** (21) 05.10.93
19 Mark **UTH** (Ger) (23) 24.08.91
40 Pelle **VAN AMERSFOORT** (18) 01.04.96
24 Szabolcs **VARGA** (Hun) (19) 17.03.95

COACH
Dwight **LODEWEGES** (57) 26.10.57

HERACLES

GOALKEEPERS
26 Michael **BROUWER** (21) 21.01.93
16 Bram **CASTRO** (Blg) (32) 30.09.82
25 Renze **FIJ** (22) 26.09.92
1 Dennis **TELGENKAMP** (27) 09.05.87

DEFENDERS
5 Fahd **AKTAOU** (21) 13.01.93
28 Travis **BRENT** (USA) (22) 17.02.92
30 Mark **ENGBERINK** (22) 12.08.92
29 Coen **GORTEMAKER** (20) 29.01.94
2 Milano **KOENDERS** (28) 31.07.86
3 Bart **SCHENKEVELD** (23) 28.08.91
32 Mike **TE WIERIK** (22) 08.06.92
4 Jeroen **VELDMATE** (26) 08.01.88
18 Ramon **ZOMER** (31) 13.04.83

MIDFIELDERS
8 Iliass **BEL HASSANI** (22) 16.09.92
10 Thomas **BRUNS** (22) 07.01.92
21 Simon **CZIOMMER** (Ger) (34) 06.11.80
23 Mark-Jan **FLEDDERUS** (32) 14.12.82
24 Menno **HEERKES** (21) 22.07.93
35 Rick **HEMMINK** (21) 14.02.93
14 Joey **PELUPESSY** (21) 15.05.93
31 Daan **RIENSTRA** (22) 06.10.92
6 Bas **SIBUM** (32) 26.12.82
17 Dario **VUJICEVIC** (Cro) (24) 01.04.90

FORWARDS
9 Denni **AVDIC** (Swe) (26) 05.09.88
20 Edwin **GYASI** (23) 01.07.91
12 Aleksei **KANGASKOLKKA** (Fin) (26) 24.01.88
11 Bryan **LINSSEN** (24) 08.10.90
15 Jaroslav **NAVRATIL** (CzR) (23) 30.12.91
13 Dragan **PALJIC** (Ger) (31) 08.04.83
22 Oussama **TANNANE** (Mor) (20) 23.03.94
19 Wout **WEGHORST** (22) 07.08.92

COACH
John **STEGEMAN** (38) 27.08.76

NAC BREDA

GOALKEEPERS
21 Gabor **BABOS** (Hun) (40) 24.10.74
12 Andries **NOPPERT** (20) 07.04.94
1 Jelle **TEN ROUWELAAR** (34) 24.12.80

DEFENDERS
5 Remi **AMIEUX** (Fra) (28) 05.09.86
4 Aleksandar **DAMCEVKSI** (Mac) (22) 21.11.92
2 Sepp **DE ROOVER** (Blg) (30) 12.10.84
3 Henrico **DROST** (27) 21.01.87
16 Isak **SSEWANKAMBO** (Swe) (18) 27.02.96
22 Gill **SWERTS** (Blg) (32) 23.09.82
15 Jesse **VAN BEZOOIJEN** (20) 28.04.94
28 Kenny **VAN DER WEG** (23) 19.02.91

MIDFIELDERS
6 Joeri **DE KAMPS** (22) 10.02.92
19 Mounir **EL ALLOUCHI** (20) 27.09.94
17 Erik **FALKENBURG** (26) 05.05.88
10 Uros **MATIC** (Ser) (24) 23.05.90
27 Brandon **ROBINSON** (19) 25.02.95
8 Jeffrey **SARPONG** (Gha) (26) 03.08.88
14 Joey **SUK** (Ins) (25) 08.07.89
23 Vinnie **VERMEER** (19) 02.07.95

FORWARDS
9 Kingsley **BOATENG** (Ita) (20) 07.04.94
7 Elson **HOOI** (Cur) (23) 01.10.91
18 Stipe **PERICA** (Cro) (19) 07.07.95
20 Mats **SEUNTJENS** (22) 17.04.92
11 Adnane **TIGHADOUINI** (22) 30.10.92

COACH
Nebojsa **GUDELJ** (Bos) (46) 23.09.68

PEC ZWOLLE

GOALKEEPERS
16 Kevin **BEGOIS** (Blg) (32) 13.05.82
25 Boy **DE JONG** (20) 10.04.94
1 Warner **HAHN** (22) 15.06.92

DEFENDERS
14 Joost **BROERSE** (35) 08.05.79
26 Kingsley **EHIZIBUE** (19) 25.05.95
33 Leroy **LABYLLE** (Blg) (23) 11.03.91
28 Thomas **LAM** (Fin) (21) 18.12.93
24 Steven Fernandes **PEREIRA** (20) 13.04.94
3 Trent **SAINSBURY** (Aus) (22) 05.01.92
4 Maikel **VAN DER WERFF** (25) 22.04.89
5 Bart **VAN HINTUM** (27) 16.01.87
2 Bram **VAN POLEN** (29) 11.10.85

MIDFIELDERS
29 Wout **BRAMA** (28) 21.08.86
19 Rick **DEKKER** (19) 15.03.95
11 Jesper **DROST** (21) 11.01.93
18 Wouter **MARINUS** (19) 18.02.95
10 Stefan **NIJLAND** (26) 10.08.88
23 Ben **RIENSTRA** (24) 05.06.90
6 Mustafa **SAYMAK** (21) 11.02.93
30 Ryan **THOMAS** (NZ) (20) 20.12.94

FORWARDS
44 Dimitrios **FERFELIS** (Gre) (21) 05.04.93
9 Nikos **IOANNIDIS** (Gre) (20) 26.04.94
8 Thanassis **KARAGOUNIS** (Gre) (23) 25.09.91
7 Jody **LUKOKI** (22) 15.11.92
20 Soufian **MORO** (21) 21.02.93
15 Tomas **NECID** (CzR) (25) 13.08.89

COACH
Ron **JANS** (56) 29.09.58

PSV

GOALKEEPERS
31 Nigel **BERTRAMS** (21) 08.01.93
22 Remko **PASVEER** (31) 18.11.83
1 Jeroen **ZOET** (23) 06.01.91

DEFENDERS
4 Santiago **ARIAS** (Col) (22) 13.01.92
20 Joshua **BRENET** (20) 20.03.94
5 Jeffrey **BRUMA** (21) 13.11.91
30 Jordy **DE WIJS** (19) 08.01.95
29 Jorrit **HENDRIX** (19) 06.02.95
2 Nicolas **ISIMAT-MIRIN** (Fra) (23) 15.11.91
25 Menno **KOCH** (20) 02.07.94
3 Karim **REKIK** (20) 02.12.94
28 Abel **TAMATA** (24) 05.12.90
15 Jetro **WILLEMS** (20) 30.03.94

MIDFIELDERS
18 Andres **GUARDADO** (Mex) (28) 28.09.86
27 Oscar **HILJEMARK** (Swe) (22) 28.06.92
26 Clint **LEEMANS** (19) 15.09.95
6 Adam **MAHER** (21) 20.07.93
24 Marcel **RITZMAIER** (Aut) (21) 22.04.93
8 Stijn **SCHAARS** (30) 11.01.84
23 Rai **VLOET** (19) 08.05.95
10 Georginio **WIJNALDUM** (24) 11.11.90

FORWARDS
39 Zakaria **BAKKALI** (Blg) (18) 26.01.96
32 Aleksandar **BOLJEVIC** (Mne) (19) 12.12.95
9 Luuk **DE JONG** (24) 27.08.90
7 Memphis **DEPAY** (20) 13.02.94
14 Florian **JOZEFZOON** (23) 09.02.91
17 Jurgen **LOCADIA** (21) 07.11.93
11 Luciano **NARSINGH** (24) 13.09.90

COACH
Phillip **COCU** (44) 29.10.70

(ages as of 30.12.14)

DORDRECHT

GOALKEEPERS
25 Virgil **DEEN** (18) 10.06.96
1 Filip **KURTO** (Pol) (23) 14.06.91
13 Robbert **TE LOEKE** (26) 01.12.88

DEFENDERS
2 Jeffrey **FORTES** (CVI) (25) 22.03.89
8 Robin **GOSENS** (Ger) (20) 05.07.94
23 Josimar **LIMA** (CVI) (25) 02.08.89
6 Funso **OJO** (Blg) (23) 28.08.91
5 Marvin **PEERSMAN** (23) 10.02.91
4 William **TROOST-EKONG** (21) 01.09.93
19 Jordy **VAN DEELEN** (21) 29.06.93
17 Nando **WORMGOOR** (22) 17.02.92

MIDFIELDERS
10 Adnan **ALISIC** (30) 10.02.84
26 Sem **DE WIT** (19) 30.03.95
3 Ilias **HADDAD** (25) 01.03.89
22 Ryan **KOOLWIJK** (29) 08.08.85
24 Ibrahima **TOURE** (Sen) (19) 01.01.95
21 Rick **VAN HAAREN** (23) 21.06.91
14 Joris **VAN OVEREEM** (20) 01.06.94
15 Javier **VET** (21) 09.09.93

FORWARDS
16 Erixon **DANSO** (25) 22.07.89
18 Mohamed **HAMDAOUI** (21) 10.06.93
11 Giovanni **KORTE** (21) 01.08.93
9 Mart **LIEDER** (24) 01.05.90
7 Rihairo **MEULENS** (26) 03.06.88
20 Everon **PISAS** (20) 13.10.94
12 Rick **TEN VOORDE** (23) 20.06.91

COACH
Ernie **BRANDTS** (58) 03.02.56

EXCELSIOR

GOALKEEPERS
26 Gino **COUTINHO** (32) 05.08.82
16 Alessandro **DAMEN** (24) 17.05.90
1 Jordy **DECKERS** (25) 20.06.89

DEFENDERS
24 Daan **BOVENBERG** (26) 25.10.88
20 Elso **BRITO** (20) 02.04.94
6 Sander **FISCHER** (26) 03.09.88
2 Khalid **KARAMI** (25) 29.12.89
5 Bas **KUIPERS** (20) 17.08.94
12 Jurgen **MATTHEIJ** (21) 01.04.93
3 Kevin **VAN DIERMEN** (25) 03.07.89

MIDFIELDERS
8 Adil **AUASSAR** (26) 06.10.86
23 Luigi **BRUINS** (27) 09.03.87
4 Rick **KRUYS** (29) 09.05.85
10 Jeff **STANS** (24) 20.03.90
15 Richard **STOLTE** (24) 08.01.90
22 Toni **VARELA** (CVI) (28) 13.06.86
18 Kevin **VERMEULEN** (24) 20.11.90

FORWARDS
19 Daan **BLIJ** (21) 25.09.93
7 Jordan **BOTAKA** (21) 24.06.93
21 Carlo **DE REUVER** (19) 29.01.95
17 Ninos **GOURIYE** (23) 14.01.91
25 Marko **MALETIC** (Bos) (21) 25.10.93
11 Daryl **VAN MIEGHEM** (25) 05.12.89
9 Tom **VAN WEERT** (24) 07.06.90

COACH
Marinus **DIJKHUIZEN** (42) 04.01.72

FEYENOORD

GOALKEEPERS
13 Ronald **GRAAFLAND** (35) 30.04.79
1 Erwin **MULDER** (25) 03.03.89
16 Kenneth **VERMEER** (28) 10.01.86

DEFENDERS
23 Khalid **BOULAHROUZ** (33) 28.12.81
5 Terence **KONGOLO** (20) 14.02.94
32 Rodny **LOPES CABRAL** (19) 28.01.95
4 Joris **MATHIJSEN** (34) 05.04.80
18 Miquel **NELOM** (24) 22.09.90
22 Sven **VAN BEEK** (20) 28.07.94
2 Luke **WILKSHIRE** (Aus) (33) 02.10.81
25 Lucas **WOUDENBERG** (20) 25.04.94

MIDFIELDERS
6 Jordy **CLASIE** (23) 27.06.91
8 Karim **EL AHMADI** (Mor) (29) 27.01.85
10 Lex **IMMERS** (28) 08.06.86
26 Rick **KARSDORP** (19) 11.02.95
24 Matthew **STEENVOORDEN** (21) 09.01.93
28 Jens **TOORNSTRA** (25) 01.01.89
21 Tonny **VILHENA** (19) 03.01.95

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29 Anass **ACHAHBAR** (20) 13.01.94
14 Bilal **BASACIKOGLU** (19) 26.03.95
7 Jean-Paul **BOETIUS** (20) 22.03.94
31 Wessel **DAMMERS** (19) 01.03.95
15 Colin **KAZIM-RICHARDS** (Tur) (28) 26.08.86
17 Elvis **MANU** (21) 13.08.93
27 Ruben **SCHAKEN** (32) 03.04.82
19 Mitchell **TE VREDE** (23) 07.08.91
11 Wesley **VERHOEK** (28) 25.09.86

COACH
Fred **RUTTEN** (52) 05.12.62

GO AHEAD EAGLES

GOALKEEPERS
16 Erik **CUMMINS** (26) 10.08.88
24 Ruben **LUCAS** (20) 14.09.94
1 Mickey **VAN DER HART** (20) 13.06.94

DEFENDERS
12 Mawouna **AMEVOR** (Tog) (23) 16.12.91
17 Sven **NIEUWPOORT** (21) 13.04.93
5 Xandro **SCHENK** (21) 28.04.93
4 Jop **VAN DER LINDEN** (24) 17.07.90
23 Robin **VAN DER MEER** (19) 21.02.95
3 Bart **VRIENDS** (23) 09.05.91
25 Giliano **WIJNALDUM** (22) 31.08.92

MIDFIELDERS
15 Sander **DUITS** (31) 29.08.83
18 Lars **LAMBOOIJ** (26) 16.04.88
6 Sjoerd **OVERGOOR** (26) 06.09.88
10 Jeffrey **RIJSDIJK** (27) 12.09.87
8 Deniz **TURUC** (21) 29.01.93
20 Peter **VAN OOIJEN** (22) 16.02.92

FORWARDS
21 Nick **DE BONDT** (20) 21.04.94
11 Lesley **DE SA** (21) 02.04.93
9 Marnix **KOLDER** (33) 31.01.81
19 Fernando **LEWIS** (21) 31.01.93
27 Puck **POSTMA** (17) 18.02.97
22 Jules **REIMERINK** (25) 30.09.89
7 Alex **SCHALK** (22) 07.08.92
26 Teije **TEN DEN** (21) 29.04.93

COACH
Foeke **BOOY** (52) 25.04.62

GRONINGEN

GOALKEEPERS
1 Sergio **PADT** (24) 06.06.90
26 Peter **VAN DER VLAG** (37) 05.12.77

DEFENDERS
15 Nick **BAKKER** (22) 21.07.92
34 Roland **BAAS** (18) 02.03.96
35 Glenn **BIJL** (19) 13.07.95
3 Eric **BOTTEGHIN** (Bra) (27) 31.08.87
5 Lorenzo **BURNET** (23) 11.01.91
33 Hans **HATEBOER** (20) 09.01.94
2 Johan **KAPPELHOF** (24) 05.08.90
4 Martijn **VAN DER LAAN** (26) 29.07.88

MIDFIELDERS
16 Hilal **BEN MOUSSA** (22) 22.05.92
18 Henk **BOS** (22) 12.11.92
10 Tjarron **CHERY** (26) 04.06.88
8 Michael **DE LEEUW** (28) 07.10.86
27 Hristijan **DENKOVSKI** (Mac) (20) 15.04.94
24 Tom **HIARIEJ** (26) 25.07.88
6 Maikel **KIEFTENBELD** (24) 26.06.90
21 Rasmus **LINDGREN** (Swe) (30) 29.11.84
32 Burak **SABAN** (20) 20.04.94
23 Nick **VAN DER VELDEN** (30) 16.12.84
20 Yoell **VAN NIEFF** (21) 17.06.93

FORWARDS
7 Jarchinio **ANTONIA** (24) 27.12.90
31 Arjen **HAGENAUW** (20) 11.08.94
9 Danny **HOESEN** (23) 15.01.91
19 Dino **ISLAMOVIC** (Swe) (20) 17.01.94
14 Mimoun **MAHI** (20) 13.03.94
36 Genero **ZEEFUIK** (24) 05.04.90

COACH
Erwin **VAN DE LOOI** (42) 25.02.72

TWENTE

GOALKEEPERS
35 Filip **BEDNAREK** (Pol) (22) 26.09.92
1 Nick **MARSMAN** (24) 01.10.90
20 Sonny **STEVENS** (22) 22.06.92

DEFENDERS
23 Joachim **ANDERSEN** (Den) (18) 31.05.96
17 Rasmus **BENGTSSON** (Swe) (28) 26.06.86
3 Andreas **BJELLAND** (Den) (26) 11.07.88
16 Tim **BREUKERS** (27) 04.11.87
15 Dico **KOPPERS** (22) 31.01.92
4 Darryl **LACHMAN** (25) 11.11.89
2 Cuco **MARTINA** (Cur) (25) 25.09.89

MIDFIELDERS
8 Kyle **EBECILIO** (20) 17.02.94
19 Shadrach **EGHAN** (Gha) (20) 04.07.94
24 Orlando **ENGELAAR** (35) 24.08.79
21 Felipe **GUTIERREZ** (Chl) (24) 08.10.90
33 Kasper **KUSK** (Den) (23) 10.11.91
7 Youness **MOKHTAR** (23) 29.08.91
22 Kamohelo **MOKOTJO** (SAf) (23) 11.03.91
5 Robbert **SCHILDER** (28) 18.04.86
26 Renato **TAPIA** (Per) (19) 28.07.95
10 Hakim **ZIYECH** (21) 19.03.93

FORWARDS
9 Torgeir **BORVEN** (Nor) (23) 03.12.91
30 Luc **CASTAIGNOS** (22) 27.02.92
11 Jesus **CORONA** (Mex) (21) 06.01.93
14 Ryo **MIYAICHI** (Jap) (22) 14.12.92
25 Bilal **OULD-CHIKH** (17) 28.07.97

COACH
Alfred **SCHREUDER** (42) 02.11.72

UTRECHT

GOALKEEPERS
46 Menno **HEUS** (18) 17.12.95
1 Robbin **RUITER** (27) 25.03.87
30 Jeroen **VERHOEVEN** (34) 30.04.80

DEFENDERS
24 Yannick **CORTIE** (21) 07.05.93
34 Jeff **HARDEVELD** (19) 27.02.95
14 Kai **HEERINGS** (24) 12.01.90
5 Christiaan **KUM** (29) 13.09.85
3 Ramon **LEEUWIN** (27) 01.09.87
25 Timo **LETSCHERT** (21) 25.05.93
13 Gevero **MARKIET** (23) 08.04.91
2 Mark **VAN DER MAAREL** (25) 12.08.89
17 Michael **ZULLO** (Aus) (26) 11.09.88

MIDFIELDERS
44 Sofyan **AMRABAT** (Mor) (18) 21.08.96
16 Yassin **AYOUB** (20) 06.03.94
10 Nacer **BARAZITE** (24) 27.05.90
15 Mark **DIEMERS** (21) 11.10.93
8 Willem **JANSSEN** (28) 04.07.86
6 Anouar **KALI** (23) 03.06.91
26 Sean **KLAIBER** (20) 31.07.94
21 Kristoffer **PETERSON** (Swe) (20) 28.11.94
18 Fernando **QUESADA** (Spa) (20) 05.01.94

FORWARDS
47 Rodney **ANTWI** (19) 03.11.95
39 Cedric **BADJECK** (Cam) (19) 25.01.95
41 Hamza **BOUKHARI** (19) 28.03.95
9 Ruud **BOYMANS** (25) 28.04.89
7 Edouard **DUPLAN** (Fra) (31) 13.05.83
49 Issa **KALLON** (18) 03.01.96
37 Gyrano **KERK** (19) 02.12.95
11 Tommy **OAR** (Aus) (23) 10.12.91
45 Rubio **RUBIN** (USA) (18) 01.03.96
27 Gyliano **VAN VELZEN** (20) 14.04.94
20 Danny **VERBEEK** (24) 15.08.90

COACH
Rob **ALFLEN** (46) 07.05.68

VITESSE

On loan...Traore of Chelsea

GOALKEEPERS
48 Jeroen **HOUWEN** (18) 18.02.96
1 Eloy **ROOM** (25) 06.02.89
22 Piet **VELTHUIZEN** (28) 03.11.86

DEFENDERS
35 Rochdi **ACHENTEH** (26) 07.03.88
40 Kevin **DIKS** (18) 06.10.96
37 Guram **KASHIA** (Geo) (27) 04.07.87
15 Arnold **KRUISWIJK** (30) 02.11.84
5 Kelvin **LEERDAM** (24) 24.06.90
3 Dan **MORI** (Isr) (26) 08.11.88
23 Jan-Arie **VAN DER HEIJDEN** (26) 03.03.88
2 **WALLACE** (Bra) (20) 01.05.94

MIDFIELDERS
25 Gino **BOSZ** (21) 23.04.93
30 Renato **IBARRA** (Ecu) (23) 20.01.91
20 Zakaria **LABYAD** (Mor) (21) 09.03.93
6 Josh **McEACHRAN** (Eng) (21) 01.03.93
18 Marvelous **NAKAMBA** (Zim) (20) 19.01.94
10 Davy **PROPPER** (23) 02.09.91
27 Bertrand **TRAORE** (BuF) (19) 06.09.95
7 Marko **VEJINOVIC** (24) 03.02.90

FORWARDS
14 Abiola **DAUDA** (Nga) (26) 03.02.88
9 Uros **DJURDJEVIC** (Ser) (20) 02.03.94
8 Valeri **KAZAISHVILI** (Geo) (21) 29.01.93
11 Denys **OLIYNYK** (Ukr) (27) 16.06.87

COACH
Peter **BOSZ** (51) 21.11.63

WILLEM II

GOALKEEPERS
31 Mattijs **BRANDERHORST** (21) 31.12.93
1 Kostas **LAMPROU** (Gre) (23) 18.09.91
21 David **MEUL** (Blg) (33) 07.03.81

DEFENDERS
28 Tim **CORNELISSE** (36) 03.04.78
35 Mitchell **DIJKS** (21) 09.02.93
3 Freek **HEERKENS** (25) 13.09.89
19 Jonas **HEYMANS** (21) 06.02.93
4 Jordens **PETERS** (27) 03.05.87
5 Frank **VAN DER STRUIJK** (29) 28.03.85
15 Dries **WUYTENS** (Blg) (23) 18.03.91

MIDFIELDERS
17 Robert **BRABER** (32) 09.11.82
8 Robbie **HAEMHOUTS** (31) 09.12.83
12 Ricardo **IPPEL** (24) 31.08.90
10 Ali **MESSAOUD** (23) 13.04.91
6 Fabian **SPORKSLEDE** (21) 03.08.93
30 Jordy **VLEUGELS** (Blg) (18) 17.05.96
29 Stijn **WUYTENS** (Blg) (25) 08.10.89

FORWARDS
11 Bruno **ANDRADE** (Bra) (25) 02.03.89
9 Samuel **ARMENTEROS** (Swe) (24) 27.05.90
20 Jerson **CABRAL** (23) 03.01.91
32 Stijn **DERKX** (19) 02.03.95
7 Terrel **ONDAAN** (21) 09.09.93
14 Ben **SAHAR** (Isr) (25) 10.08.89
36 Charlton **VICENTO** (23) 19.01.91

COACH
Jurgen **STREPPEL** (45) 25.06.69

World Soccer's GREAT TEAMS

Spain 2012

The side that won a third successive international title is arguably the greatest of all time

History makers...the team that became the first to retain the Euro title and win three international trophies on the trot

Spain's Euro 2012 success in Poland/Ukraine saw them become the only national team to win three major trophies in a row and the only side to retain the European title.

World Soccer's Gavin Hamilton wrote in the July 2012 issue: "Spain's breathtaking display in the Final was a fitting finale to a wonderful tournament. Inevitably, Spain have earned plaudits as one of the great, possibly the greatest, teams of all time."

Four years after Luis Aragones won the 2008 Euros, Vicente Del Bosque continued the success with a World Cup triumph in 2010 and the 2012 Euro title.

Del Bosque deployed Cesc Fabregas in a "false nine" role as the fulcrum of the attack, and as Hamilton explained in *World Soccer*'s July edition: "Their movement frightened France boss Laurent Blanc into tactical and selection suicide [in the quarter-finals]; their movement so consumed Portugal into confrontation that Joao Moutinho and company did not have the time to prepare enough bullets for Cristiano Ronaldo to fire [in the semis]; and, in the Final, that natural mixture of pace and technique ripped the legs off an Italy side appeared worn to a semi-standstill merely from the effort of singing their national anthem."

The Final was one-way traffic from as early as the 14th minute when a scintillating goal from David Silva set Spain on their way. The rampaging full-back Jordi Alba added a second before half-time, and late goals from subs Fernando Torres (who became the first man to score in two Euro Finals) and Juan Mata secured the win.

World Soccer's Final report concluded: "Spain's champions of 2008 had evolved into world champions in 2010 and have now been transformed, temporarily, into football immortals courtesy of those goals from David Silva and Jordi Alba in the first half, then from substitutes Torres and Mata in the second."

Spain's reign may have ended in Brazil in 2014, but in 2012 they were perhaps the best ever. **WS**

THE COACH AND HIS TEAM

Vicente Del Bosque

Capped 18 times by Spain, including once as a sub at the 1980 Euros, he played over 300 games for Real Madrid before becoming coach. Despite winning two European Cups, two La Liga titles, one European Super Cup and the Intercontinental Cup in the space of four years, he was sacked in 2003. He succeeded Luis Aragones after Spain's successful Euro 2008 campaign and led the side to a first-ever World Cup triumph two years later. The only coach to have won the World Cup, European Championship and the Champions League.

Tactics

Fabregas played as a midfielder in a centre-forward's role, with balls played into his feet, rather than in the air. As Silva, Iniesta, Alonso and Alba broke beyond him, he was ideally equipped to slide passes through to them. Busquets played the holding role, with Xavi and Alonso just in front of him. The reliable Casillas in goal, and Pique and Ramos in central defence, were formidable.

THE STARTING XI

Iker Casillas
Goalkeeper
Conceded just one goal at Euro 2012, he captained Spain to two Euro titles and one World Cup win.

Alvaro Arbeloa
Right-back
Intelligent and reliable, he played every minute of every match at the Euro 2012 finals.

Gerard Pique
Centre-back
Another ever-present, his partnership with Ramos was all-important in Spain's triumph.

Sergio Ramos
Centre-back
Played right-back at Euro 2008. Scored with a "Panenka" penalty in the semi-final shoot-out.

Jordi Alba
Left-back
Made his name with his runs down the flank, one of which led to Spain's second goal in the Final.

Xavi
Midfielder
Struggled in the early part of the tournament but came good in the knockout stage.

Sergio Busquets
Midfielder
Defensive midfielder who is strong in the tackle and tactically astute.

Xabi Alonso
Midfielder
Starred in the quarter-final win against France, scoring both goals on his 100th appearance.

Cesc Fabregas
Midfielder
Performed brilliantly as a "false nine", having been on the bench in 2008 and 2010.

David Silva
Forward
Started every game but was substituted in five of the six. Scored the first goal in the Final.

Andres Iniesta
Forward
Two years after scoring the winner in the World Cup Final he was Spain's best player at Euro 2012.

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